The BUNGALOW BOYS in the Great North West

DEXTER J. FORRESTER

CHS-148 C#

Basil Hardwick
Xmas 1916.

"HERE GOES!" JACK LEAPED FORWARD AND OUTWARD. HE LANDED RIGHT ON THE SLOOP'S DECK.

—Page 43.

THE BUNGALOW BOYS

IN THE GREAT NORTHWEST

BY

DEXTER J. FORRESTER

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The Bungalow Boys in the Great Northwest.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE VALLEY.

Turning over his morning mail, which Jared Fogg had just brought into the little Maine valley, Mr. Chisholm Dacre, the Bungalow Boys' uncle, came across a letter that caused him to pucker up his lips and emit an astonished whistle through his crisp, gray beard. A perplexed look showed on his sun-burned face. Turning back to the first page, he began to read the closely written epistle over once more.

Evidently there was something in it that caused Mr. Dacre considerable astonishment. His reading of the missive was not quite completed, how-

ever, when the sudden sound of fresh, young voices caused him to glance upward.

Skimming across the deep little lake stretched in front of the bungalow came a green canoe. It contained two occupants, a pair of bright-faced lads, blue-eyed and wavy-haired. Their likeness left no doubt that they were brothers. In khaki trousers and canoeing caps, with the sleeves of their gray flannel shirts rolled up above the elbow exposing the tan of healthy muscular flesh, they were as likely a looking couple of lads as you would have run across in a muster-roll of the vigorous, clean-limbed youth of America. Regular out-of-door chaps, they. You couldn't have helped taking an immediate liking to Tom Dacre and his young brother Jack if you had stood beside Mr. Dacre that bright morning in early summer and watched the lightly fashioned craft skimming across the water, its flashing paddles wielded by the aforesaid lusty young arms.

"Well, who would think to look at those two lads that they had but recently undergone such an experience as being marooned in the Trop-

ics?" murmured Mr. Dacre to himself, as he watched his two nephews draw nearer.

There was a fond and proud light in his eyes as they dwelt on his sturdy young relatives. In his mind he ran over once more the stirring incidents in which they had all three participated in the Bahamas, and which were fully related in a previous volume of this series—"The Bungalow Boys Marooned in the Tropics."

Our old readers will be able to recall, too, the bungalow, and the lake, and the country surrounding them. These environments formed the scene of the first volume of this series—"The Bungalow Boys."

How different the little Maine lake looked now to its appearance the last time we saw it. Then it was swollen, angry, and discolored by the tumultuous waters of a cloudburst. At the water gate leading to the old lumber flume stood Tom Dacre and Sam Hartley, horror on their faces, while out on the lake, clinging to a capsized canoe, were two figures—those of a man and a boy. Suddenly the man raises his hand, and the

next instant a cowardly blow has left him the sole occupant of the drifting canoe. Swept on by the current, the lad, his features distorted by fear, is being sucked into the angry waters of the flume, when a figure leaps into the water to the rescue, and——

But we are wandering from the present aspect of things. All that happened a good while ago, when the Bungalow Boys were having their troubles with the "Trubblers," as old Jasper used to call them. At that time the little valley, not far from the north branch of the Penobscot River, was, as we know, tenanted by a desperate gang of rascals bent on ousting the lads from their strange legacy.

Everything is very different in the valley now. The old lumber camp up the creek—in the waters of which Jumbo, the big trout, used to lurk—has been painted and carpentered, and carpeted and furnished, till you wouldn't know it for the same place. Mrs. Sambo Bijur, a worthy widow, is conducting a boarding house there to the huge disgust of the boys. Somehow, exciting—peril-

ously so—as the old days often were, they have several times caught themselves wishing they were back again.

"It's getting awfully tame," were Tom's words only the day before, when he had finished fishing the youngest of the Soopendyke family—of New York—out of the lake in which the said youngest member of the Soopendykes had been bent on drowning himself, or so it seemed. His distracted mother had rushed up and down on the shore the while.

"Like an old biddy that has discovered one of her chickens to be a duck," chuckled Jack, in relating the story.

"And she kissed me," chimed in Tom, with intense disgust, "and said I was a real nice boy, and if I'd come up to the boarding house some day she'd let me have a saucer of ice cream."

Mr. Dacre had laughed heartily at this narration.

"Too old for ice cream since we defeated the wiles of Messrs. Walstein, Dampier and Co.—eh, Tom?" he exclaimed, leaning back in his big

chair on the bungalow porch and laughing till the tears ran down his weather-beaten cheeks.

"It—it isn't that, sir," Jack had put in, "but a fellow—well, he objects to being slobbered over."

"Better than being shot at, though, isn't it, lads?" inquired Mr. Dacre, his gray eyes holding a merry twinkle.

"Um—well," rejoined Tom, with a judicial air, "you know, Uncle, we've seen so much more exciting times in this old valley that it seems strange and unnatural to be overrun with Widow Bijur's boarders. If it isn't one of the little Soopendykes that's in trouble, it's Professor Dalhousie Dingle, with that inquiring child of his. I never saw such a child. Always asking questions. The other day the professor caught a bug and proceeded to stick a pin through it as he always does.

" 'Pa,' asked Young Dingle, 'does that hurt the bug?'

" 'I suppose so, my son,' answered the professor.

" 'Then the bug doesn't like it?'

" 'I guess not.'

" 'Will the bug die?'

" 'Undoubtedly, my boy.'

" 'Why do you kill bugs, papa?'

" 'For the purposes of science, my boy,' answered the professor.

" 'Pa?'

" 'Yes, Douglas.'

" 'What is science?'

" 'It's—it's—ah, well, the art of explaining things, my boy.'

" 'Does it tell everything?'

" 'Yes, my boy.'

" 'Then what killed the Dead Sea, Pa?' "

Up to this point Mr. Dacre had listened gravely enough, but here he had to burst into a roar of laughter. When his merriment had subsided, he wished to know how the professor had dealt with such a "stumper."

"What did he say to that, Tom?"

"Well," laughed Tom, "I guess it was too much for him, for I heard him call Mrs. Bijur

and ask her to give the lad a cookie. He said the boy's brain was so large it was eating up his mind."

This conversation is related so that the reader may form some idea of how the valley has changed from the last time we participated in the Bungalow Boys' adventures therein. Mrs. Bijur had other boarders, but Mrs. Soopendyke, with her numerous progeny, and Professor Dingle and his inquiring son, were the most striking types. But while we have been relating something of the Bungalow Boys' neighbors, they have run their canoe up to the wharf, made fast the painter, and, with paddles over their shoulders—for fear of predatory Soopendykes—made their their way up to the porch.

"Out early to-day, Tom," was Mr. Dacre's greeting.

"Yes, we thought we'd see if we couldn't succeed in getting a bass or two before the sun got too hot," rejoined Tom.

"And you did?"

For answer Tom held up a string of silvery beauties.

"Not bad for two hours' work," laughed Jack, leaning his rod against the porch.

"No, indeed, and more especially as Jasper has just informed me that we are almost out of meat. I was thinking of taking a stroll up to Mrs. Bijur's after a while, to see if I could borrow some. Do you boys want to go?"

Tom threw up his hands and burst into a laugh in which Jack joined.

"Might as well," they chuckled. "At all events, there's always something amusing going on up there. By the way, the bugologist" (Tom's name for the dignified Professor Dingle)" is off on a new tack now."

"Is that so?" inquired Mr. Dacre interestedly, "and what is that, pray?"

"Why he's got some wonderful notion about a new explosive. He's been experimenting with it for some days now."

"A new explosive!" echoed Mr. Dacre, in an

amazed tone; "well, what does he expect to do with that?"

"Sell it to the government, I guess," chuckled Tom. "I'll bet, though, it won't be as effective as that electric juice we turned into the hand-rail of the dear old *Omoo* off Don Lopez's island."

"I think it would have to be pretty powerful to equal the effects of that, indeed," laughed Mr. Dacre, rising and thrusting the letter which had interested him so much into a side pocket of his loose linen jacket. He reached for his hat.

"Well, let's be starting before it gets really warm. By the way, boys, as we go along I've something to talk to you about. But first I want to ask you a question. I want you to answer it honestly. Aren't you getting a bit tired of your bungalow?"

Tom and Jack exchanged glances. As we know, the bungalow and the estate surrounding it, was their "legacy" from their uncle, and not for worlds would they have admitted that they were getting a little tired of the pleasant monot-

ony of their lives there. But being ingenuous lads they had not been able to conceal it—as has been hinted, in fact.

"Come," said Mr. Dacre, a quizzical smile playing about the corners of his firm, yet kind, mouth. "Speak out; haven't you exchanged views about the monotony of perfect plain sailing, or something of that sort?"

"Why, uncle, you must be a wizard?" exclaimed Tom. "Have you overheard us?"

Then both lads burst into a laugh, seeing how they had betrayed themselves.

"There, there," chuckled Mr. Dacre, "you'd never do for diplomats—too honest," he murmured, half to himself; "but, as Jasper would say—being as how you have given yourselves away, I have something to propose to you."

"Hurray!" shouted Jack, capering about, "a trip? I'll bet the hole out of a doughnut it's a trip!"

"And you would win that bet," cried Mr. Dacre, drawing out the letter from his pocket. "In the mail to-day there came a letter from

a man from whom I have not heard for some time—a good many years, in fact."

A cloud passed over Mr. Dacre's face. They could see that for a moment he was back in the old painful past. But it passed as rapidly as a shadow on the surface of the rippling lake.

"My friend has a ranch in Washington State," he went on, while the boys, with parted lips and sparkling eyes, fairly drank in his words. "It appears that he read in the papers about our adventures in the tropics. This letter is the result. He informs me that if I am anxious to make an investment with a part of the treasure of the lost galleon, that no better opportunity offers than the timber and fruit country of Washington. He says that he imagines that I must be anxious for rest anyhow, and, to make a long story short, he extends to me and to my two celebrated nephews"—the boys blushed—"a hearty invitation to visit him, renew old friendship, and take a look at the country. What do you say, boys—shall we go?"

Tom drew a long breath.

"Say, ever since I read that book on the Great Northwest of our country I've longed to get out there. Jack and I have talked it over many a time."

Here Jack nodded vigorously.

"Will we go, uncle? Well," Tom paused as he cast about for a fitting phrase, "well," he burst out, "if we *don't,* your Bungalow Boys will be Grumble-oh! boys."

"Then I will write him this afternoon that we will come," said Mr. Dacre soberly, though it was easy to see that he was almost as pleased as the lads at their decision. As for the boys, they joined in a wild half-war-dance, half-waltz that didn't end till Jack was almost waltzed into the lake—not that in his frame of mind he would have cared.

At this stage of the proceedings an inky-black countenance, crowned with a tightly curling crop of grayish wool, projected from a rear door of the bungalow. It was Jasper—former servant of Dr. Parsons, but now attached to the Bungalow Boys' uncle.

"Fo' de lan's sake!" he cried, throwing up his hands in consternation. "Dem boys done be actin' up lak dey was two crazy pertatur bugs. Misto Dacon" (Dacre was beyond Jasper), "Mr. Dacon, sah, does I git dat meat o' does we dine on flap jacks an' bacum?"

"You get the meat," laughed Mr. Dacre, regarding with intense amusement the tragic mien of his colored servitor. "Come, boys, give Jasper your fish—just to ease his mind—and insure the safety of Mrs. Bijur's chickens—and then let's hurry on our errand. There's a lot to do before we start for The Great Northwest."

"The great northwest!" echoed Tom, picking up the now despised string of bass. "If there are any two finer words in the geographies, I've never heard them."

CHAPTER II.

A "BLOW-UP."

All the way to Mrs. Bijur's—along the well-remembered trail, with its alder clumps fringing the crystal-clear Sawmill Creek and the big pool where of yore lurked Jumbo, and into which Tom had taken a header on one memorable occasion—there was naturally only one topic of conversation, the coming trip, of course. By the time they reached the former lumber camp, and the place which had more recently been the headquarters of the Trulliber gang, the boys had crossed and recrossed the continent at least half a dozen times, and the geography and animal and vegetable history of the State of Washington been thoroughly discussed. The trim buildings, now painted white, with red roofs and green shutters and doors, presented a violent contrast to the ramshackle collection of structures in which the Trullibers had squatted.

The barn in which Tom lay a prisoner, while in the next room he had heard Dan Dark and the others plotting, was now painted a vivid red, and a neat tin roof glittered above its contents of spicy-smelling hay and well-fed, sleek cows and horses. Josiah Bijur had left his widow a snug little fortune and, with true Maine thrift, she had spent it to the best advantage. Already she had more applications for boarders than her place would hold. If she could have persuaded the boys she would have liked to rent their bungalow for the overflow. But the fancy rent she offered had no allurement for them. Their share of the treasure of the galleon had made them two very independent lads.

Hamish Boggs, Mrs. Bijur's hired man, was clambering off a load of hay as the party from the bungalow came in sight. He had just hauled it in from the mountain meadow, not far, by the way, from the foot of the cliff where Tom took that memorable slide after his imprisonment in the cave, which came near proving his grave.

Going to the rear of the wagon, which was

halted on the steep grade in front of the house, he placed two big stones under each of the rear wheels.

"Don't want the wagon to go rolling down the hill, eh, Hamish?" said Mr. Dacre, as they came up.

"No, sir," responded Hamish emphatically; "there's a deep pool in the creek at the bottom of this grade and if ther old wagin ever started a-runnin' daown it—wall, by chowder, she'd take er bath whether she needed one er not."

So saying, he proceeded to unhitch the horses and lead them toward the barn.

"Why don't you drag the load in under the mow?" asked Tom, not quite seeing the object of leaving the load stalled in front of the house.

"Wall, yer see," drawled Hamish, "thet mow's got quite a sight of grass inter it naow. By chowder, ef I tried ter put this load in on top, it might raise the roof ofen it, so I'm gon' ter shift it back a bit."

At this juncture Mrs. Bijur appeared—a thin,

sharp-featured woman in a blue calico dress, with a sunbonnet to match.

"Wall, land o' goodness, ef it ain't Mister Dacre," she cried. "Wall, dear suz, what brings you here? Hamish, yer better 'tend to thet sick caow afore you put in yer hay. Do it right arter you've got them horses put up."

"And leave ther hay out thar, mum?" asked Hamish.

"Yes, of course. Nobody ain't goin' ter steal it, be they? Go on with yer. Mr. Dacre, come in. Hev a glass of buttermilk. Dear suz! if I ain't run off my mortal leags, an'—oh, you air a sniffin', too, be yer?"

She broke off her torrent of talk as she noticed Mr. Dacre sniffing with a critical nose. The atmosphere was, in fact, impregnated with a very queer odor.

"Guess some senile egg must have gone off and died round here," said Tom, with a snicker to Jack.

"It's that perfusser," explained Mrs. Bijur. "I tole him that he'd hev ter stop experimentin' ef

it was goin' ter smell us out o' house an' home this er way. Awful, ain't it?"

"Well, it is rather strong," admitted Mr. Dacre, as they took seats in the stuffy parlor, with its wax fruit under their glass covers, the imitation lace tidies on the backs of the stiff chairs, and the noisy, eight-day clock ticking away like a trip-hammer.

"What ever is the professor doing?" he inquired.

" 'Sperimentin'," sniffed Mrs. Bijur, smoothing out her apron.

"Must be experimenting with cold-storage eggs," put in Tom.

"No," rejoined Mrs. Bijur gravely, "it's some sort of a 'splosive. I tell you, Mister Dacre, I'm terrible skeered. Reely I be. S'pose thet stuff 'ud go off? We'd all be blown up in our beds."

"Unless you happened to be awake, ma'am," answered Mr. Dacre.

"Ah, but he don't 'speriment only at night," was the rejoinder. "He's off all day huntin' bugs and nasty crawly things. It's only at night he

works at it, an' I tell yer, I've got my hands full with them Soopendyke children. They're allers a-tryin' to git inter the perfusser's laboratory—he calls it. If they ever did, dear knows what 'ud happen. The perfusser says that ef any one who didn't understand that stuff was to meddle with it, it might blow up."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mr. Dacre, with mock anxiety. "I hope the young Soopendykes are all safely accounted for."

"I dunno. There's no telling whar them young varmints will git ter," was the reply. "They're every place all ter oncet, and no place long tergither. Tother day I cotched one tryin' ter git inter the laboratory. Crawlin' over ther roof, he was, and goin' ter drop inter ther window by a water pipe. Seems ter me thet they are just achin' ter blow themselves up, and—— Good land! Look at 'em now!"

The widow rushed to the window and shook her fist at four young Soopendykes who were disporting themselves in the hay wagon, leaping about among the fragrant stuff, and pitching it at

one another, to the great detriment of Hamish's neat load.

"Where is Mrs. Soopendyke?" inquired Mr. Dacre, as the widow finished shooing—or imagined she had done so—the invading youngsters from their play.

"Lyin' down with a headache," was the rejoinder. "Poor woman, them young 'uns be a handful, an' no mistake."

As Mrs. Bijur seemed inclined to enlarge on her troubles, Mr. Dacre lost no time, as soon as he could do so, in explaining his errand.

"Meat!" exclaimed Mrs. Bijur. "Good land, go daown cellar and help yourself. The boys can give me some of those nice fresh fish in trade some time. No, you won't pay me, Mr. Dacre. Dear suz, ain't we neighbors, and—— Land o' Gosh-en!"

The last words came from the good lady in a perfect shriek. And well they might, for her speech had been interrupted by a heavy sound that shook the house to its foundations.

Bo-o-o-o-m!

"Good heavens!" cried Mr. Dacre, rushing out of the door, followed by the boys. "An explosion!"

"That thar dratted explosive soup of the perfusser's has gone off at last!" shrieked the widow, following them in most undignified haste. As they emerged from the house, a shrill cry rang out:

"Ma-ma! Oh, ma-ma!"

"Just as I thought, it's one of them Soopendykes!" cried Mrs. Bijur. "Good land! Look at that!"

She indicated the extension of the house, a low one-storied structure, jutting out from the rear. It was in this that the professor had set up his "laboratory," as Mrs. Bijur called it. Her exclamation was justified.

A large hole, some three feet six inches in diameter, gaped in the once orderly tin roof. Through the aperture thus disclosed, yellow smoke was pouring in a malodorous cloud, while, on a refuse pile not far away, the eldest Soopendyke, Van Peyster, aged twelve, was picking himself up

with an injured expression. His Fauntleroy suit, with clean lace cuffs and collar—fresh that morning—was in blackened shreds. His long yellow curls were singed to a dismal resemblance to their former ideal of mother's beauty. Master Van Peyster Soopendyke was indeed a melancholy object, but he seemed unhurt, as he advanced toward them with howls of:

"I didn't mean ter! I didn't mean ter!"

"You young catamount!" shrilled the widow. "What in the name of time hev yer bin a-doin' of?"

"Boo-hoo! I jes' was foolin' with that stuff of the professor's an' it went off!" howled the Soopendyke youngster, while the boys likewise exploded into shouts of laughter. In the meantime, Mr. Dacre had burst in the locked door and discovered that, beyond wrecking the laboratory, the explosion had not done much harm. He had just finished his examination when Mrs. Soopendyke, her hair falling in disorder and her ample form hastily dressed, came rushing out.

"My boy! My boy!" she cried, in agonized

tones. "Van Peyster, my darling, where are you hurt; are you——"

The good lady had proceeded as far as this when her eyes fell on the smoke-blackened, ragged object, which had been blown through the roof by the force of the explosion. Luckily, his having landed on the rubbish pile had saved his limbs. But Master Soopendyke, as has been said, was an alarming object for a fond parent's eye to light upon.

"Oh, Van Peyster!" screamed his mother. "Great heavens——"

"Aw, keep still, maw. I ain't hurt," announced the dutiful son.

"Oh, thank heaven for that! Come to my arms, my darling! My joy! Come——"

Mrs. Soopendyke was proceeding to hurl herself upon her offspring, who was about to elude her, when from the front of the house came an appalling shriek.

"It's Courtney!" screamed out the unhappy lady. "Oh, merciful heavens! What is happening now?"

CHAPTER III.

AN INVOLUNTARY HAY-RIDE.

Louder and louder came the shrieks and cries, and the party, all of them considerably alarmed, rushed around to the front of the house to perceive what this new uproar might mean. They beheld a sight that made Mrs. Soopendyke begin to cry out in real earnest.

One of her family had, in a playful mood, removed the stones which held Hamish's hay wagon stationary on the steep grade. As a natural result, it began to slide backward down the hill. But what had thrilled the good lady with horror, and the others with not a little alarm, was the sight of three other young Soopendykes, including the baby, on the top of the load. It was from them and from Master Courtney Soopendyke, who perceived too late the mischief he had done by removing the stones, that the ear-piercing yells proceeded.

"Oh, save them! Oh, save my bee-yoot-i-ful children!" screamed Mrs. Soopendyke, wringing her hands, as the ponderous wagon, with its screaming load of children, began to glide off more and more rapidly.

"Great Scott!" shouted Mr. Dacre. "That deep hole in the creek is at the bottom of the hill!"

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" shrilled Mrs. Soopendyke, and fainted just in time to fall into the arms of Hamish, who came running round from the barn.

"Help! Fire! Murder! Send for the fire department!" screamed Mrs. Bijur, with some confusion of ideas.

In the midst of this pandemonium Tom and Jack and their uncle alone kept cool heads. Before the wagon had proceeded very far, the two Bungalow Boys were off after it, covering the ground in big leaps. But fast as they went, the wagon rumbled down the grade—which grew steeper as it neared the creek—just a little faster seemingly—than they did. Its tongue stuck straight out in front like the bowsprit of a vessel.

It was for this point that both lads were aiming. Tom had a plan in his mind to avert the catastrophe that seemed almost inevitable.

Mustering every ounce of strength in his body, he made a spurt and succeeded in grasping the projecting tongue. In a second Jack was at his side.

"Swing her!" gasped out Tom. "It's their only chance."

But to swing over the tongue of a moving wagon when it is moving away from you is a pretty hard task. For a few seconds it looked as if, instead of succeeding in carrying out Tom's suddenly-thought-of plan, both Bungalow Boys were going to be carried off by the wagon.

But a bit of rough ground gave them a foothold, and, exerting every ounce of power, the lads both shoved on the springy pole for all they were worth. Slowly it swung over, and the wagon altered its course.

"Steer her for that clump of bushes. They'll stop her!" puffed out Tom.

"All right," panted Jack, but as he gasped out the words there came an ominous sound:

Crack!

"Wow! The pole's cracking!" yelled Jack.

The next instant the tough wood, which, strong as it seemed, was sun-dried and old, snapped off short in their hands under the unusual strain.

A cry of alarm broke out from the watchers at the top of the hill as this occurred. It looked as if nothing could now save the wagon from a dive into the creek.

But even as the shout resounded and the boys gave exclamations of disgust at their failure, the wagon drove into the mass of brush at almost the exact point for which they had been aiming. At just that instant a big rock had caught and diverted one of the hind wheels, and this, combined with the swing in the right direction already given the vehicle, saved the day.

With a resounding crashing and crackling, and redoubled yells from the terrified young Soopendykes on the top of the load, the wagon, as it plunged into the brush, hesitated, wavered,

and—came to a standstill. But as the wheels ceased to revolve, Hamish's carefully piled load gave a quiver, and, carrying the terrified youngsters with it, slid in a mighty pile off the wagon-bed.

Fortunately, the children were on top of the load, and they extricated themselves without difficulty. Hardly had they emerged, however, before a violent convulsion was observed in the toppled off heap, and presently a hand was seen to emerge and wave helplessly and imploringly.

"Who on earth can that be?" gasped the boys, glancing round to make sure all the group was there. Yes, they were all present and accounted for,—Mrs. Soopendyke, sobbing hysterically in the midst of her reunited family, the lads' uncle, Mrs. Bijur, Hamish, and several other boarders who had been aroused by the explosion, and had set off on a run down the hill as the wagon plunged into the brush.

Before they could hasten forward to the rescue of whoever was struggling in the hay, a bony face, the nose crowned with a pair of immense

horn spectacles, emerged. Presently it was joined by a youthful, pug-nosed countenance.

"Professor Dalhousie Dingle!" cried everybody, in astonishment. "And that dratted boy, Douglas Dingle!" echoed Mrs. Bijur.

"Yes, madam," said the professor solemnly, emerging with what dignity he could, and then, taking his boy by the hand and helping him forth, "It is Professor Dingle. May I ask if this was intentional?"

"Why, dear land, perfusser, you know——"

"I only know, madam, that while my lad Douglas here and myself were searching for specimens in the thicket we suddenly found ourselves overwhelmed with an avalanche of dried grass—or, as it is commonly called—hay. Bah! I am almost suffocated!"

The professor carefully extricated a "fox tail" from his ear and then performed the same kind office for his son and heir.

"Pa-pa," piped up the lad, "may I ask a question?"

"Yes, my lad," beamed the professor amiably

stepping down from the pile of hay, which Hamish was regarding ruefully.

"Well," spoke up Douglas, "if we had not gotten out from under that hay, would we have been suffocated?"

"Undoubtedly, my boy—undoubtedly," was the rejoinder. "Gross carelessness, too."

He scowled at the assembled group.

"Would it have hurt, pa-pa?"

"Surely, my boy. Suffocation, so science tells us, is a most painful form of death."

"Worse than measles, pa-pa?"

"Yes, my child, and——"

"Perfusser," interrupted Mrs. Bijur, with firmness, "I want to know what you intend to do about my roof?"

It was the professor's turn to look astonished.

"What roof, madam?" he asked, still brushing hay-seed from his long-tailed black coat.

"Ther roof of my extension whar you hed thet thar lab-or-at-ory—whar you was making them messes that was liable to blow up."

"Well, madam?"

"Wall, sir—they done it!"

"They done—did what, madam?"

"Blowed up!" responded Mrs. Bijur, with deadly calm.

"Good heavens, madam—impossible!"

"Not with them Soopendykes around!" was the confident response. "It's my belief they'd a turned the Garden of Eden inter a pantominium. They——"

But the professor rushed off dragging Douglas by the hand, his long coat tails flapping in the air as he sped up the road as fast as his lanky legs would carry him.

"The greatest invention of the age has gone up in smoke!" he yelled, as he flew along.

Laughing heartily over the comical outcome of events that might have proved tragic, Mr. Dacre and the boys rendered what aid they could in replacing the hay load, and then started back for the bungalow. The last they saw of the professor he was crawling about on his hands and knees, scooping up fragments of the explosive

with a tin teaspoon in one hand, and waving Mrs. Bijur indignantly to one side with the other. They little imagined, as they shook with amusement at the ludicrous picture, under what circumstances they were to meet the professor again, and what a singular part his explosive was destined to play in the not very far distant future.

CHAPTER IV.

BULLY BANJO'S SCHOONER.

"Guess this will be your getting-off place."

One of the deck hands of the smoke-grimed, shabbily painted old side-wheeler, plying between Victoria, B. C., and Seattle, paused opposite Mr. Dacre and the Bungalow Boys. They stood on the lee side of the upper deck regarding the expanse of tumbling water between them and the rocky, mountainous coast beyond. The sky was blue and clean-swept. A crisp wind, salt with the breath of the Pacific, swept along Puget Sound from the open sea.

The surging waters of the Sound reflected, but, with a deeper hue, the blue of the sky. The mountainous hills beyond were blue, too,—a purplish-blue, with the dark, inky shadows of big pines and spruces. Here and there great patches of gray rock, gaunt and bare as a wolf's back,

cropped out. Behind all the snow-clad Olympians towered whitely.

Off to port of where the steamer was now crawling slowly along—a pall of black, soft coal smoke flung behind her—was a long point, rocky and pine-clad like the mountains behind it. On the end of it was a white, melancholy day-beacon. It looked like a skeleton against its dark background.

"There's Dead Man's Point," added the friendly deck hand.

"And Jefferson Station is in beyond it?" asked Mr. Dacre.

"That's right. Must look lonesome to you Easterners."

"It certainly does," agreed Mr. Dacre. "Boys," he went on, looking anxiously landward, "I don't see a sign of a shore boat yet."

At this point of the conversation the captain pulled his whistle cord, and the ugly, old side-wheeler's siren emitted a sonorous blast.

Poking his head out of the pilot house window, he shouted down at Mr. Dacre and the boys:

"I'm a goin' ter lay off here for ten minutes. If no shore boat shows up by that time, on we go to Seattle."

"Very well," responded Mr. Dacre, hiding his vexation as best he could. "We must—but," he broke off abruptly, as from round the point there suddenly danced a small sloop. "I guess that's the boat now, captain!" he hailed up.

"Hope so, anyhow," ejaculated Tom, while the captain merely gave a grunt. He was annoyed at having to slow up his steamer. As the engine room bell jingled, the clumsy old side wheels beat the water less rapidly. Presently the old tub lay rolling in the trough of the sea almost motionless. On came the boat under a press of canvas. She heeled over smartly. In her stern was an upright figure; the lower part of his face was covered with a big, brown beard. As he saw the party, he waved a blue-shirted arm.

"That's Colton Chillingworth!" exclaimed Mr. Dacre. "I haven't seen him for ten years, but I'd know that big outline of a man any place."

The deck hands were now all ready with the

travelers' steamer trunks. The boys had their suit cases, gun bags, and fishing rods in their hands.

"How on earth are we ever going to board that boat?" wondered Jack, rather apprehensively, as the tiny craft came dancing along like a light-footed terpsichorean going through the mazes of a quadrille.

"Jump!" was Mr. Dacre's response. "These steamers don't make landings. I'm glad Chillingworth was in time, or we might have been carried on to Seattle."

And now the boat was cleverly run in alongside. She came up under the lee of the heavily rolling steamer, her sails flapping with a loud report as the wind died out of them.

"Hul-lo, Dacre!" came up a hearty hail from the big figure in the stern. "Hullo there, boys! Ready to come aboard?"

"Aye, aye, Colton!" hailed back Mr. Dacre. "We'll be with you in a minute."

"If we don't tumble overboard first," muttered Jack to himself.

"Better take the lower deck, sir," suggested one of the deck hands.

Accordingly, our party traversed the faded splendors of the little steamer's saloon and emerged presently by her paddle box. Between the side of the vessel and the big curved box was a triangular platform.

"Stand out on this, sir, and you and the boys jump from it," suggested the deck hand.

"A whole lot easier to say than to do," was Tom's mental comment. He said nothing aloud, however.

In the meantime their baggage had been lowered by a sling. A second person, who had just emerged from the cabin of the little boat, was active in stowing it in the cockpit. This personage was a Chinaman. He wore no queue, however, but still clung to the loose blue blouse and trousers of his country.

"Allee lightee. You come jumpee now," he hailed up, when the baggage was stowed.

"Here goes, boys," cried Mr. Dacre, with a laugh. He made a clean spring and landed on

the edge of the deck of the plunging sloop. The Chinaman caught him on one side, while the lad's uncle braced himself on the other by grabbing a stay. Another instant and the boys could see him and Mr. Chillingworth warmly shaking hands.

"Go ahead, Jack," urged Tom. But for once Jack did not seem anxious to take the lead. He hesitated and looked about him. But he only saw the grinning faces of the deck hands.

"Come on!" shouted his uncle, extending his arms. "It's easy. We'll catch you."

"Hum! If I had my diving suit here, I'd feel better," muttered the lad. "But—here goes!"

Like a boy making a final determined plunge into a cold tub on a winter morning, Jack leaped forward and outward. He landed right on the sloop's deck, falling in a sprawling heap. But the active Chinaman had him by the arms and he was on his feet in a jiffy. Tom followed an instant later.

Hardly had his foot touched the deck before the steamer gave a farewell blast and forged onward, leaving them alone in the tossing, tumbling

wilderness of wind-driven waters. Somehow the waves looked a lot bigger from the cockpit of the sloop than they had from the deck of the steamer.

They watched the big craft as with a dip and a splash of its wet plates, it gained speed again, several passengers gazing from its upper decks at the adventurous party in the little sloop. Introductions were speedily gone through by Mr. Dacre. The boys made up their minds that they were going to like Colton Chillingworth very much. He was a big-framed six-footer, tanned with wind and sun, and under his flannel shirt they could see the great muscles play as he moved about.

"This is Song Fu, my factotum," said Mr. Chillingworth, nodding toward the Chinaman, whose yellow face expanded into a broad grin as his master turned toward him.

"How do you do, Song Fu?" poetically asked Tom, not knowing just what else to say.

"Me welly nicely, t'ank you," was the glib response.

By this time Mr. Chillingworth had set the

helm and put the little sloop about. She fairly flew through the water, throwing back clouds of spray over the top of her tiny cabin. It was exhilarating, though, and the boys enjoyed every minute of it.

But as they sped along, it soon became apparent that the wind was freshening. The sea, too, was getting up. Great green waves towered about the boat as if they would overwhelm her. The combers raced along astern, and every minute it seemed as if one of them must come climbing over, but none did.

"Got to take another reef," said Mr. Chillingworth presently. "Can either of you boys handle a boat?"

"Well, what a question," exclaimed Mr. Dacre. "If you had seen them managing the *Omoo* in that gale off Hatteras, you'd have thought they could handle a boat, and well, too."

"That being the case, Tom here can take the tiller, while I help Fu take in sail."

Mr. Chillingworth resigned the tiller to Tom, who promptly brought the sloop up into the wind,

allowing her sails to shiver. This permitted Mr. Chillingworth and the Chinaman to get at the reef points and tie them down. This done, the owner of the boat came back to the cockpit and she was put on her course once more.

"You handled her like a veteran," said Mr. Chillingworth to Tom, who looked pleased at such praise coming from a man whom he had already made up his mind was a very capable citizen.

The rancher went on to explain something of his circumstances. He and his wife had come out there some years before. They were doing their best to wrest a living from the rough country. But it was a struggle. Mr. Chillingworth admitted that, although he had big hopes of the country ultimately becoming a new Eldorado.

"Just at present, though, it's a little rough," he admitted.

"Oh, we don't mind roughing it," responded Tom. "We're used to that."

"So I should imagine from the newspaper ac-

counts I read of your prowess," said Mr. Chillingworth dryly.

"Oh, they wrote a lot of stuff that didn't happen at all," put in Jack.

"Not to mention the pictures," laughed Mr. Dacre.

"Well," said Mr. Chillingworth, "if there were some enterprising reporter out here now, he would find plenty to write about."

"How's that?" inquired Mr. Dacre.

"Why, you may have heard of Chinese smugglers—that is to say, men who run Chinaman into the country without the formality of their obtaining papers?"

Mr. Dacre nodded.

"Something of the sort," he said.

"Well, they have been pretty active here recently. Some of the ranchers have had trouble with them."

"But surely they have notified the authorities?" exclaimed Tom.

"That's just it," said Mr. Chillingworth. "They are all afraid of the rascals. Scared of

having their buildings burned down, or their horses hamstrung, or something unpleasant like that."

"Well, if you are the same old Colton Chillingworth," smiled Mr. Dacre, "I'm sure you do not belong in that category."

A look came over Colton Chillingworth's face that the boys had not noticed on that rugged countenance before. Under his brown beard, his lips set firmly, and his eyes narrowed. Colton Chillingworth, with that expression on his features, looked like a bad man to have trouble with. But to Mr. Dacre's astonishment, and the no less surprise of the boys, his reply was somewhat hesitant.

"Well, you see, Dacre," he said uncertainly, "a married man has others than himself to look out for. By the way, my wife doesn't know anything about the troubles. Please don't mention them to her, will you?"

"Certainly not," was the rejoinder. "But——"

A sudden cry from the Chinaman cut his words short. The Mongolian raised a hand, and

with a long, yellow finger pointed off to the west. The boys, following with their eyes the direction in which he pointed, at first could descry nothing, but presently, as the sloop rose on the top of a wave, they could make out, in the blue distance, the sudden flash of a white sail on the Sound.

"It's the schooner, Fu?" asked Mr. Chillingworth eagerly.

The Celestial nodded. No change of expression had come over his mask-like features, but the boys vaguely felt that behind the impenetrable face lay a troubled mind.

Mr. Dacre looked his questions.

"What is there about the schooner particularly interesting?" he asked, at length.

"Oh, nothing much," said Mr. Chillingworth, with what seemed rather a forced laugh. "Except that she is Bully Banjo's craft."

"Bully Banjo?" echoed Mr. Dacre, in a puzzled tone.

"Yes. Or Simon Lake's, to give the rascal his real name. Lake is the man who is at the pres-

ent time the real ruler of the ranchers in this district," said Mr. Chillingworth bitterly. "Dacre," he went on, "I'm afraid that I have invited you into a troubled region. I'll give you my word, though, that when I wrote to you things were quiet enough."

"My dear fellow," was the rejoinder, "don't apologize. I myself relish a little excitement, and here are two boys who live on it."

"If that is the case," replied the other, with a wan smile, "they are on the verge of plenty—or I'm very much mistaken."

CHAPTER V.

A NIGHT OF MYSTERY.

Soon after the sloop beat up into the shelter of the point, the wind having by this time increased, to what appeared to the boys, to be a mild hurricane. The sky, too, was overcast, and big black clouds were rolling in, shrouding the dark trees and heights ashore in gloom, and turning the snow-covered peaks beyond to a dull gray. It began to feel chilly, too.

"We'll have to run up here and take the trail to the ranch," said Mr. Chillingworth, after a while.

"I thought it was quite close in here," rejoined Mr. Dacre.

"Oh, no. It's a biggish beat along the coast," replied his friend, "but it's blowing too hard now to risk beating up the shore. We'll run in under shelter of the point there, and then we can cut

across through the woods and reach the place by trail."

"But not to-night," observed Mr. Dacre, pulling out his watch. "It's after four now."

"We'll start out to-morrow morning if the wind hasn't gone down," said Mr. Chillingworth. "Fu can bring the sloop round when the wind moderates."

It was not long after this that, as they ran quite close to the shore, where the rocks sloped steeply down, that Mr. Chillingworth ordered the Chinaman to take in sail. Aided by the boys, this was soon accomplished. To the accompaniment of rattling blocks, the sails were lowered, and presently the anchor splashed overboard. The sloop then lay motionless, about thirty or forty feet off shore.

Supper was cooked and eaten in the tiny cabin, which boasted a stove. As the air had grown quite chilly, too, and the boys were wet with spray, they were all glad to warm and dry themselves in the heat. After the meal the men drew out their pipes, while Fu produced a queer-look-

ing arrangement for smoking. Its bowl was not much bigger than a thimble and made of stone. The stem was a long, slender bit of bamboo.

"Opium?" whispered Tom to Mr. Chillingworth, as the Mongolian stepped out of the cabin to give a look to the anchor.

The rancher laughed.

"No, indeed. I would have no such stuff around me. I broke Fu of smoking opium long ago. But he still clings to his old pipe."

The after-supper talk was mainly about ranching and prospects in Washington. Mr. Dacre appeared to be much interested in the timber aspects of the country.

"There are millions of feet of good timber around here," said Mr. Chillingworth. "It can be bought cheap, too, right now. You see, there is no railroad here yet, and no means of getting the timber out. It wouldn't pay to cut it. But in a few years——"

He spread his hands. Evidently he deemed the prospects to be very good. Mr. Dacre nodded thoughtfully. Then the two men produced

old envelopes and stubs of pencils and fell to figuring. This didn't interest the boys much.

"Let's slip outside and see what's doing," suggested Tom to Jack, after a while.

The younger lad agreed willingly. In a few minutes they were on deck. Overhead the wind roared and shouted, but on deck, sheltered as it was by the wooded, rocky point, things were comparatively quiet. Ashore they could hear the wind humming and booming in the trees like the notes of a mighty pipe organ. Even where they stood the balsam-scented breath of the forest was borne to them. They inhaled it delightedly.

"Not unlike Maine," decided Tom.

All at once, as they stood there enjoying the fresh air after the stuffy cabin, Jack gripped Tom's arm tightly.

"Hark!" he whispered.

Above the hurly-burly of the wind and the clamor of the waters as they dashed against the shore, they could hear a voice upraised in what was, apparently, a tone of command. Then came a loud sound of metal rattling. The sound was

unmistakable to any one who had any knowledge of seafaring.

"Some vessel's dropped her anchor not far from us," decided Tom.

"Right," assented Jack, "and strain your eyes a bit and you'll see that she's a schooner."

Peering into the darkness it was possible to make out, after a good deal of difficulty, the black outlines of two masts. They were barely perceptible, though, and if the boys had not heard the rattle of the anchor chain and thus known in which direction to look, they would not have made them out at all.

"Jack!" exclaimed Tom, as a sudden thought shot into his head, "that must be Bully Banjo's schooner."

"You think so?"

"Well, what other vessel would put in here? It's true that we had to seek shelter, but a wind that would sink us wouldn't bother a large vessel. This is a lonely place, and just the sort of harbor Simon Lake would seek."

"But we are in here; surely he wouldn't risk the chance of actual discovery?"

"But he doesn't know we're here. The sloop is painted black. It is unlikely that he sighted us beating in for shore this afternoon. We'd better tell the others."

"That's right," agreed Jack, starting for the cabin door. But Tom laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Don't open it," he said. "They'd see the light."

"Then how are we to tell them of what we have seen?"

"Tap on the cabin roof and then speak down the ventilator."

"Good idea. We'll do it."

"Mr. Chillingworth," whispered Tom, after his signal had been answered, and he had hastily warned the occupants of the cabin not to open the door, "there's a big schooner come to anchor not far away. We thought you ought to know about it."

The boys could hear an amazed exclamation

come up the ventilator. The next instant the light was extinguished, and presently the cabin door was swiftly opened. Mr. Dacre, his friend, and Fu were soon standing by the boys on the deck, hearing their story. It was perfectly safe to talk in natural tones as the wind was blowing on shore, and it was doubtful if even had they shouted they could have been heard on the schooner.

On board the larger vessel, however, the case was different. The group on the yawl could now hear voices coming down the wind. Lights, too, began to bob about on the schooner's decks. Evidently something was going forward.

"Our best plan is to listen and see what we can find out," advised Mr. Chillingworth, after they had discussed the strange arrival of the schooner.

"Looks as if they had come in here for some definite purpose," said Mr. Dacre.

"That's right," was the rejoinder, "and I can guess just what that purpose is. Lake's schooner has not been round here for some time till the

other day. I believe that she has just arrived from the island in the Pacific, where they say he picks up his Chinamen. They may be going to land a bunch to-night."

"You think so?" asked Jack, his pulses beginning to beat.

"I don't see what else they would have sought out this lonely spot for," was the rejoinder. "Listen!"

A squeaking sound "cheep-cheep" came over the water from the schooner.

"They are getting ready to lower a boat," cried Mr. Chillingworth. "I was right."

"And they are going to turn a lot of Chinamen loose ashore?" gasped Tom.

"Well, they won't turn them loose exactly," rejoined Mr. Chillingworth, and if it had not been dark Tom would have noticed that he smiled. "Their method, so rumor has it, is to borrow some rancher's team and wagon and drive the yellow men through the woods to a mining district to the north. Things are run pretty laxly

there, and nobody asks questions so long as they get Chinese labor cheap."

"But doesn't every Chinaman who comes into the country have to have a certificate bearing his picture?" asked Tom. "Seems to me I've read that."

"Perfectly true," replied Mr. Chillingworth, "but it's easy enough for men of Lake's stripe to fake such certificates. After the men have worked at the mines a while, they leave there and mingle with their countrymen in the China-towns of any large Eastern or Western city. If any one asks questions, all they have to do is to show their certificates. As for the pictures, I guess one does for all. Every Chinaman looks pretty much alike."

"That's a fact," agreed Mr. Dacre, "but all this must take a lot of money to engineer. Who provides the funds?"

"Ah, that's a mystery. I've heard that a big syndicate is in it. It must pay tremendously. You see, the Chinamen will pay all the way from two hundred to a thousand dollars to be landed

safely in the country. Lake, if he manages things right, can bring in as many as two hundred at a time. You see for yourself what that means—sixty thousand dollars at one fell swoop."

"Phew!" whistled Mr. Dacre, "no wonder desperate men will take desperate chances for such rewards. But you mentioned an island from which Lake brings the men. Where is it?"

"That's pure speculation," rejoined Mr. Chillingworth. "The only reason for presuming that there is an island on which the Chinamen live till they can be run into the country is this: It is not probable that a schooner like Lake's can run over to China. Her trips, in fact, rarely occupy more than a month or so. But as for the location of the island, I am as much in the dark as you are."

"Hark!" cried Tom suddenly. "Isn't that the sound of oars?"

"It is," agreed Mr. Dacre, after listening a minute. "They've got a lantern in the boat, too. See, it is coming this way."

Sure enough, they could now perceive a light

coming over the water, evidently borne in the boat the splash of whose oars they had heard. On through the darkness came the moving light. Presently it stopped not far from the sloop. The occupants of the latter could see now that three men were in the little craft. One, a tall man with a sailor cap on his head, another, a short, thick-set fellow, and the third man was undoubtedly a Chinaman. It was too dark to make out features, but the lantern light shone sufficiently on the occupants of the small boat for their general outlines to be apparent.

The Oriental member of the party wore loose flowing garb. On his head was a skull-cap surmounted by a button.

But after their first surprise our friends on the sloop turned their attention from the craft and its occupants to the freight with which the little boat was loaded. So far as they could make out, these were big canvas sacks about five feet or more in length. There seemed to be more than one of them. The boat rode very low in the

water, apparently; whatever the freight was, it was fairly heavy.

As the oarsmen ceased their motions and the boat came to a stop, the men in her arose and the two white men laid hold of one of the bundles at either end. They lifted it, and before the party on the sloop had any idea of what they were going to do, they had swung their burden two or three times and then cast it out into the water. It sank with a sullen splash. As it did so, the Chinaman raised his hands above his head and seemed to be uttering some prayer, or invoking some deity.

But a sudden noise in their midst caused the party on the sloop to turn sharply.

For some inexplicable reason the mask-faced Fu was groveling on the deck. His lips were murmuring oriental words in a rapid sing-song. In his voice, and, above all, in his attitude, there was every indication of abject terror.

Mr. Chillingworth stepped over to him and shook him not too roughly by the shoulder.

"Fu, Fu, what's the trouble?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, Missa Chillingworth, me welly much flaid," stammered the Mongolian, still evidently in the bonds of fear.

"But why, Fu—why? Is it because of what they are doing in that boat?"

"Yes, Missa Chillingworth. Dey be deadee men in dose sacks. Dey dlop them in the sea for gib dem belial."

"They are burying them you mean?"

"Yes, missa. De Chinaman he allee same plest. He say players for dem. Plenty bad for Chinaman to see."

"And for any one else, too, I should think," commented Mr. Chillingworth. "It is evident enough now what those fellows are up to. Some Chinamen have died during the voyage and they are burying them in this cove. Packed together as they are, it's surprising more of them are not killed."

A slight shudder passed through the boys as they heard. There was something uncanny, something awe-inspiring about this night burial in the lonely cove by the light of the lantern.

Presently the last of the grewsome freight of the small boat was consigned to the waves, and she was pulled back to the schooner.

"We must set a good watch to-night," said Mr. Chillingworth. "It is important to know if those fellows land anybody."

The others agreed. Accordingly, it fell to Tom and Jack to watch the first part of the night, while the remaining hours were carefully watched through by Mr. Dacre and Mr. Chillingworth. Fu was too badly scared by the sight of the burial of his countrymen to be of much use. It appeared, according to his belief, that if a Chinaman gazed on another's burial without announcing himself, he would be haunted forever by the ghosts of the buried ones.

The watch was kept faithfully, and carefully, but nothing occurred apparently to mar the silence of the dark hours. Yet, when the first streaks of gray began to show above the pine-clad shoulders of the coast hills, the dim dawn showed them that no schooner was there.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. DACRE SUSTAINS AN ACCIDENT.

During breakfast the mysterious vanishing of the schooner was discussed, with what eager interest may be imagined. They could not understand why the noise of her incoming anchor chain had not been observed. Nor yet, why the creak of the blocks and the rattle of the rigging as her sails were hoisted, had not been heard. It was Tom who solved the first part of the puzzle.

Coming on deck after breakfast, the lad found the sun sparkling down on the dancing waters, and flashing brightly on the white-capped wave tops. Looking in the direction in which he was sure the schooner had lain the night before, he perceived a dark object bobbing about on the water. It looked like a barrel. And so, on investigation, it proved to be. When the sloop was sculled alongside by her big sixteen-foot oars, they found that an anchor chain had been made

fast to the keg. The schooner had silently slipped her moorings in the night. The fact that the keg was fast to her anchor chain would make it an easy matter, however, for her to pick it up again at her leisure.

"Does that mean that they saw us, do you think?" asked Mr. Dacre.

Mr. Chillingworth shook his head.

"If they had seen us," he said rather grimly, "I hardly think we should have all been here this morning. At any rate, that is the reputation that Bully Banjo has. He has an unpleasant way of disposing of any one he thinks may have spied on him."

"I don't see how in the twentieth century such a rascal can be permitted at large," said Mr. Dacre angrily. "He ought to be captured and his just deserts dealt out to him."

"Well," said Mr. Chillingworth, "the trouble is just this. Most of the ranchers hereabouts are poorish men. The country has not been fully cleared, and their ranches, so far, yield them small profits. This Bully Banjo pays well for

the teams he borrows. Generally, when the horses are returned, there's a twenty-dollar note with them."

"But the man is engaged in an illegal business," said Tom.

Again Mr. Chillingworth smiled.

"It's mighty hard to get the average man to see that smuggling anything, from cigars to Chinamen, is illegal," he said. "On the contrary, most men appear to have an idea it's smart to beat Uncle Sam. But," his voice changed and took on a stern note, "I, for one, am not going to stand for this rascal's domineering any longer. Some weeks ago I wrote to Washington and informed the Secret Service bureau there exactly what was going on. They promised to investigate, but since then I've heard nothing more. You can readily see that it would be folly for me to make a stand alone against this man. Why, he's capable of swooping down on my ranch and burning it to the ground."

"That's true," mused Mr. Dacre thoughtfully.

"I quite see where this Bully Banjo's power comes in. But——"

He broke off short. Some instinct made him turn at the moment and he saw that Fu, the Chinaman, had been eagerly drinking in every word that had been said. As he met Mr. Dacre's eyes, the Mongolian muttered something and dived into the cabin, ostensibly very busy washing dishes.

"You needn't worry about Fu," laughed Mr. Chillingworth. "He's faithful as the day is long."

"I don't know," said Mr. Dacre seriously. "Somehow I never like to trust a Chinaman. They remind me of cats in their mysterious way of moving about you. If that fellow wanted to, he could cause you a lot of trouble now."

"Ah, but he won't," laughed Mr. Chillingworth, "and, in any event, what could he do?"

"Why," said Mr. Dacre slowly, "he could inform Bully Banjo, for instance, that you have written to Washington and that the Secret Service may start an investigation."

"Jove! That's so!" exclaimed the rancher.

"But," he laughed lightly, "there's no fear of that. Fu is as honest as the day is long. Besides, he is in my debt. I, and some friends of mine, rescued him from a gang of white roughs, who had falsely accused him of a theft, and who were going to string him up."

"Just the same," said Mr. Dacre, "I have found it is a good rule to trust a Chinaman just as far as you can see him, and in most cases not so far as that. But, to return to Bully Banjo's reason for buoying his anchor, it evidently means that he intends to come back here."

"Yes, and something else," said Mr. Chillingworth.

"What is that?"

"Why, that he just slipped in here to bury the dead in calm water. That office performed, he has evidently made off to some other point of the coast to land his Chinamen."

This was admitted to be a plausible explanation.

While it was calm enough in the shelter of the point the loud roaring in the pine tops, and the

distant whitecaps showed that outside it was still rough. Too rough for the sloop to attempt the passage, Mr. Chillingworth declared. That being the case, it was decided to leave the sloop in the charge of Fu, and to set out overland for the ranch. When it grew calmer Fu would sail the sloop around to the waters off the ranch.

In accordance with this decision, the sloop was sculled by Fu close in under a ledge of rocks where there was deep water. The boys made the jump ashore with ease. It was then Mr. Dacre's turn. Although it has been said that it was calm in the cove, there was still enough sea running to make the sloop quite lively, so jumping from her called for some agility. Mr. Dacre essayed the leap just as a particularly big wave came sliding under the little vessel. The consequent lurch upset his calculations and instead of landing cleanly on the rock he lost his balance, and would have fallen back into the water had not Tom seized him. In another instant Jack, too, had his uncle's arm.

In a minute they had him up on the rock, but

instead of standing upright, Mr. Dacre, his face drawn with pain, and dotted with beads of sweat, sank to the ground. It was apparent that he was suffering intense pain.

"Good gracious, Dacre, are you hurt?" asked Mr. Chillingworth, while the alarmed boys also poured out questions.

"It's—it's nothing," said Mr. Dacre, with a brave attempt at a careless smile. "An old fracture of my leg. I think——"

His head fell back and his lips went white. Had Tom not caught him he would have fallen prone. Mr. Chillingworth was on the rocks in a bound as the lad's uncle lost his senses under the keen pain.

"Here, I'm a surgeon in a rough way," he said. "One has to be everything out in this rough country. Let me have a look at that leg."

With a slash of his penknife, he had Mr. Dacre's trouser leg ripped open in an instant. He ran an experienced hand over the limb.

"Hum," he said, his face growing serious, "an

old fracture—broken again by that fall. Fu, get me the medicine chest out of the cabin."

The Chinaman, his face as stolid as ever, obeyed. Mr. Chillingworth took from the mahogany box some bandages, and by the time he had done this Mr. Dacre's eyes were opened again.

"What's the verdict, Mr. Chillingworth?" he asked pluckily.

"Well, old man," was the rejoinder, "I don't know yet if it's a fracture or just a sprain. I hope it's the latter, and then we'll have you on your feet in a few days. The first thing to be done is to get you back on board the sloop. I'll stay with you while these young men and Fu push on to the ranch and get some remedies of which I will give them a list."

Mr. Dacre made a wry face.

"Is it as bad as that? I can't move?" he asked.

"Well, just you try it," said Mr. Chillingworth, —but one effort was enough for the injured man.

"Well, Chillingworth, you've got a lame duck on your hands," he said.

"Nonsense, we'll soon have you all right again. Here, boys, you get hold of your uncle's head. Fu, place a mattress and some blankets on deck there. I'll get hold of his feet. Don't move till I say so."

It was not an easy task to get Mr. Dacre back on board the sloop, but it was accomplished at last without accident. He was then placed on the mattress on deck and lay there stiller than the boys had ever seen his active form.

Mr. Chillingworth dived into the cabin. When he reappeared it was with a penciled list, which he handed to Tom.

"There," he said, "now that's done. Just hand that to my wife and she'll give you the necessary things. By the way, don't breathe a word to her about Bully Banjo."

The boys promised not to mention the occurrences of the night. Soon after, Fu was ready. He carried a small flour sack, with what provisions could be spared, over his shoulders. It

was arranged that they were to get horses at the ranch and ride back to the sloop, using all the speed they could. After bidding good-by to their injured uncle, and Mr. Chillingworth, the little party set out along the trail. Fu's blue bloused and loose trousered form slipped noiselessly along in front. Behind him toiled the boys. It did not seem more than a few seconds after they had left the sloop that they were plunged into a thick forest. On every side—like the columns of a vast cathedral—shot up the reddish, smooth trunks of the great pines. Far above their dark tops could be caught occasional glimpses of the blue sky. The brush and vegetation were dense almost as in the tropics. There is a great deal of rain in Washington, and the luxuriant growth is the result. Creepers, flowering shrubs, and big ferns were everywhere, walling in the trail with an impenetrable maze of foliage.

Above them they could hear the wind blowing through the dark pines, roaring a deep, musical bass. But down on the trail it was stiflingly hot. The heavy, sweet odor of the pines, rank and

resinous was everywhere. They plodded along in silence, always with that blue, silent figure gliding along just ahead. It was curious that as Tom kept his eyes riveted on the noiseless figure that Mr. Dacre's words should have recurred to him with startling force:

"Trust a Chinaman only as far as you can see him, and in most cases not so far as that."

CHAPTER VII.

THE TALL CHINAMAN.

For an hour or more they kept steadily on. The Chinaman in the lead had nothing to say except to turn his head with an occasional caution to avoid some obstacle in the path. As for the boys, after the first mile, they, too, relapsed into silence. It was rough going, and, although they had been through some pretty hard ground at times, this trail through the Washington forest was more rugged than anything they had hitherto encountered.

"How far did Mr. Chillingworth say it was to the ranch?" asked Jack, after a while.

"About fifteen miles this way," rejoined Tom. "You see, this trail goes fairly parallel with the coast, but it doesn't follow all its in and outs. In that way we cut off a good deal of distance."

"Say that Chinaman is a talkative young

party, isn't he?" laughed Jack, after another interval of silence.

"I guess his sort don't do much talking as a rule," rejoined Tom, "but it seems to me that his moodiness dates from the time he saw that funeral last night out there in the cove. According to my way of thinking, he has something on his conscience."

"Well, if he honestly believes that the ghosts of all those fellows he saw buried are going to haunt him, no wonder he has something on his mind," chuckled Jack. "I'm going to try to get something out of him, anyhow."

Suddenly he hailed the Chinaman.

"Hey Fu, what make trail so crooked?"

"Injun makee him longee time ago," responded the Mongolian. "Him come lock he no movee, him go lound. Allee same Chinee," he added, "too muchee tlouble getee him out of way. Heap more easty walk lound him."

"There's something in that, too, when you come to think of it," mused Tom. "Anyway, it goes to

show the difference between Indians and Chinese and white men."

"I guess that's the reason neither the Chinese nor the Indians have ever 'arrived,'" commented Jack. "It takes a lot longer to go round than to keep bang on a straight course."

"That's right," assented the other lad. "I really believe you are becoming a philosopher, Jack."

"Like Professor Dingle," was the laughing answer.

Once more the conversation languished and they plodded steadily on. But it was warmer now —almost unbearably so, down in the windless floor of the forest. From the pine needles a thick pollen-like dust rose that filled mouth and nostrils with an irritating dust. The boys' mouths grew parched and dry. They would have given a good deal for a drink of clear, sparkling water.

"Say, Fu," hailed Jack presently, "we find some water pretty soon?"

"Pletty soon," grunted the Chinaman, who, de-

spite his fragile frame, seemed tireless and entirely devoid of hunger or thirst. However, shortly after noon, when they had reached a spot where a great rock impended above the trail, while below their feet the chasm sloped down to unknown depths, the blue-bloused figure stopped short in its tireless walk and waited for the boys to come up.

"Pletty good spling here," he said, diving off into the brush with the canteen. "Me catchum watel."

"All right, catch all you want of it," cried Jack, flinging himself exhaustedly on a bed of fern at the side of the rough path. The Chinaman was soon back with the water. He lit a fire and skillfully made tea. With a tin cup each of the refreshing stuff, the boys soon felt better. From the bag they lunched on salt beef, crackers and cheese, and dried apricots. As might be expected, by mid-afternoon their thirst was once more raging.

"How far is it to the ranch?" inquired Tom, for the dozenth time, as they pluckily plodded

along. Not for worlds would they have let that silent, fatigueless Chinaman have perceived that they were almost worn out.

"Plitty soon we cross canyon. Ranchee him not far then," was the response.

"Nothing for it but to stick," muttered Tom grittily. "But, oh, what wouldn't I give for a drink of water. I'm as dry—as dry—as those dried apricots."

"Pooh!" retorted Jack. "They were fairly dripping with moisture compared to the way I feel."

All at once, a few rods farther, a distant rumbling sound down in the canyon, and off to the right, was borne to their ears. Both lads listened a minute and then gave a joyous whoop.

It was water,—a considerable river, apparently. Anyhow, it was real water, no doubt of that. As they listened, they could hear it gurgling and splashing as it dashed along.

"Hi there, Fu!" hailed Jack, adopting the Chinaman's own lingo. "We go catchum water way down in canyon."

But for some reason or other the Chinaman did not seem anxious for the lads to do this. He shook his pig-tailed head.

"You waitee," he advised. "By um bye find plentee welly nicee watel."

"Well, this water right here is plentee nicee for me," rejoined Jack. "So here goes."

Followed by Tom, he plunged off the trail down the steep declivity, clinging to brush and small saplings as he went. Grumbling to himself in a low tone, the Chinaman followed. It was clear that he thought the proceedings foolish in the extreme.

The descent was longer as well as steeper than they had imagined it would be, but every minute the roaring voice of the concealed river or stream grew louder.

All at once, they emerged from a clump of brush, not unlike our eastern alders—almost upon the bank of a fine river. It was a lot bigger than they had expected, and was rushing along with the turbulent velocity characteristic of mountain water. Here and there were black,

deep eddies dotted with circling flecks of white, yeasty foam. But the main stream dashed between its steep, rocky banks like a racehorse, flinging spray and spindrift high in the air when it encountered a check. The water was greenish —almost a glassy tint. The boys learned later that this was because it was snow water and came from the high Olympians.

Flinging themselves flat by the side of one of the eddies, they drank greedily.

"Reminds me of what that kid said when he showed his mother a fine spring he had discovered, and the good lady wished to know how to drink out of it," chuckled Jack, as they paused for breath.

"What was that?" inquired Tom, wiping his wet mouth with the back of a sun-burned hand.

" 'Why, maw,' said the kid, 'you just lie on your tummy and drink uphill.' "

"That does pretty nearly describe it for a fact," agreed Tom. As he spoke, both boys straightened up from their recumbent position. Hardly had they done so and were scrambling to their

feet when there came a sudden, sharp crackling of the brush higher up the stream. Before they had time to recover from their surprise, or to even hazard a guess at what the noise might mean, the brush parted and a figure stepped forth.

Both boys uttered a cry of amazement as their eyes fell on the newcomer. He was a Chinaman —tall, grave, and with a face like a parchment mask.

As Fu saw him, he fell on his face and began muttering incoherent noises like those he had given vent to when he cast himself on the deck of the sloop the night before.

The newcomer was the first to speak. He did so in a deep, sonorous voice very unlike the squeaky, jerky mode of utterance of Fu.

"White boys come with me," he said, in a tone that indicated that he did not expect to be disobeyed.

"Well, of all the nerve," breathed the astonished Jack to himself. But before he could speak a word aloud, Tom spoke up:

"We are on our way to a ranch," he said, "and must reach there by sundown. We'll have to hurry on."

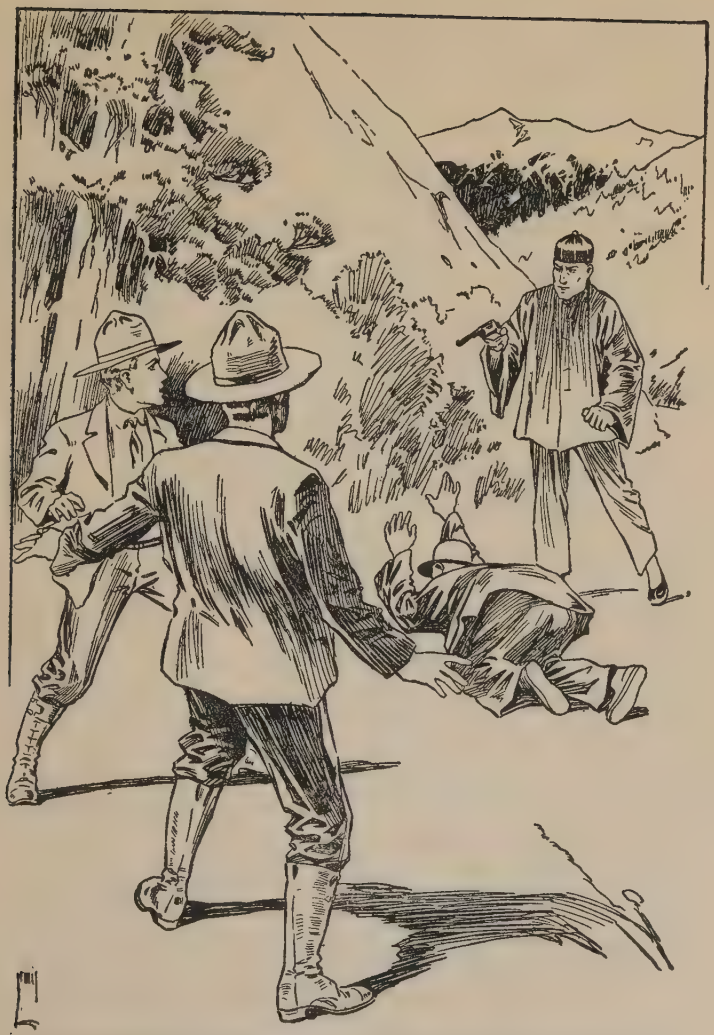
No change of expression crossed that yellow mask, but the tall Chinaman's hand slipped into his blouse sleeve, which was loose and flowing. It was done so rapidly that before the boys had fairly noticed the movement a revolver was pointing at them; the sunlight that struck down through the dark-topped pines glinted ominously on its blued barrel.

The Chinaman, in the same level, monotonous voice, repeated his command:

"White boys come with me."

"Why, confound it all——" burst out Tom, but somehow the sight of that tall, motionless figure, with the expressionless face staring unblinkingly at them, and the revolver pointed menacingly in their direction, made him break off short.

"Oh, all right, then," he said. "I guess we'll have to. You've got the drop on us. But if there were any authorities near, you'd hear of this."



Before the boys had fairly noticed the movement a revolver was pointing at them.

The ghost of a smile flitted across the tall Chinaman's hitherto fixed visage. But he made no comment. Instead, he turned to the recumbent Fu, and spoke sharply to him in Chinese. As he was addressed, Fu rose with alacrity and bowed low three times. He seemed to be terrified out of his wits, and fairly whimpered as the stern gaze of his majestic countryman fell upon him.

"White boys walk in front," ordered the tall Chinaman, motioning toward the clump of brush from which he had so suddenly materialized.

They now saw that there was a narrow trail leading through it. And so, down this narrow path the odd procession started—the two lads in front, and behind the oddly assorted pair of Mongolians.

It would be wrong to say the boys were frightened. To be frightened, a certain amount of previous apprehension is necessary. This thing had happened so suddenly and was so utterly inexplicable that they were fairly stunned. Their sensations, as they walked among the thick-growing bushes, were not unlike those of per-

sons in a dream. Somehow, at every turn of the path, they expected to wake up.

And wake up they did presently. The wakening came as, after traversing the narrow trail for a half mile, they suddenly emerged on a camp under a clump of big pines. At one side of the open space in which three tents were pitched, the stream boiled and roared. On the other, the precipice shot up. But the camp was screened from view from above by the brush which grew out of cracks in the cliff-face. Beyond the river another wooded precipice arose. This was a frowning rampart of bare, scarred rock. All this uneasily impressed the boys. They could perceive that they were in a sort of natural man-trap.

This sense of uneasiness increased as, their first rapid glance over, they observed details. In front of one of the tents was seated a tall, lanky figure, dressed in rough mackinack trousers, calf skin boots, a blue shirt open to expose a sinewy throat, and, to crown all, a battered sombrero.

This man was seated on an old soap box and strumming on a banjo as they entered the glade.

At the sound of footsteps he looked up and showed a dark, high-cheek-boned face with a thin, hawk-like nose, and a pair of piercing, steely-gray eyes. The man was clean shaven and his lips were thin, close-pressed, and cruel. This countenance was framed in a mass of lank, black hair, so long that it hung down to the shoulders of his faded shirt.

The figure, its occupation, and the previous incidents of the adventure all combined to form an intuition which suddenly flashed with convincing force into Tom's mind:

This place was the hidden camp of the Chinese runners, and the figure on the soap box was Bully Banjo—the feared and admired Simon Lake himself.

"Right smart work, by Chowder!" he exclaimed, setting aside his banjo and rising on his long, thin limbs as the boys and Fu were marched into his presence. His voice was as thin, sharp, and penetrating as his eyes, and was un-

mistakably that of a downeaster. In fact, Simon Lake was a native of Nantucket. From whaling he had drifted to sealing. From sealing to seal poaching in the Aleutian, and from that it was but a step to his present employment. A shudder that they could not suppress ran through the boys as they realized that they were in the presence of this notorious sea wolf.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE GRIP OF SIMON LAKE.

But Simon Lake's voice, setting aside its rasping natural inflection, was mild enough as he addressed them.

"Wa-al, boys, yer see thet I've got a smart long arm."

"I'd like to know by what right you've had us brought here in this fashion," broke out Tom indignantly. "We're not interfering with you. Why, then, can't you leave us alone?"

"Jes' cos I want er bit uv infermation frum yer," rejoined Simon easily. He leaned down and picked up a bit of wood. Then, drawing a knife, he shaped it to a toothpick and thrust it in his mouth. During the pause the boys noticed that several rough-looking men had sauntered up from various positions about the camp. Among them was one short, stocky man, who might have been the thickset man of the boat the night before.

This individual's hat was shoved back—for it was warm and stuffy in this place—exposing a ruddy stubble of hair. A bristly mustache as coarse as wire sprouted from his upper lip. This man was Zeb Hunt, Bully Banjo's mate when afloat and chief lieutenant ashore. In some ways he was a bigger ruffian than his superior.

"Ez I sed," resumed Simon Lake, when he had shaped the pick to his satisfaction, "I want er bit uv infermation from yer. It ain't often thet Simon Lake wants ter know suthin' thet he kain't find out right smart fer hisself. But this yar time it's diff'ent. I'm a kalkerlatin' on you byes helpin' me out."

A sudden gleam came into those cold, steely eyes. A flash of warning not to trifle with him, it seemed. But it died out as suddenly as it had come, and in his monotonous Yankee drawl, Simon went on:

"Ther hull in an' outs uv it is—how fur hez Chillingwuth gone?"

"I don't know what you mean," exclaimed

Tom, who had decided to act as spokesman, and silenced the impetuous Jack by a look.

"Oh, yes, yer do, boy. Daon't try ter gilf-licker me. I'm ez smart ez a steel trap, boy, and ez quick as sixty-'leven, so da-ont rile me up. I'm askin' yer ag'in—how fur hez Chillingworth gone?"

"He's anchored down in the cove," said Tom, willfully misunderstanding him.

Again that angry gleam shone in Bully Banjo's eyes. His thin lips tightened till they were a mere slit across his gaunt visage.

"Daon't rile me, boy," he said, in an almost pleading voice, although Tom was swift to catch the menace behind it. "Daon't rile me. Yer seen thet them I wants I gits. Yer seen thet when that Chink yonder walked inter yer by the crick. Speak me true, bye, an' speak me fair, an' yer kin go on yer way. But ef yer lie—wa-al, by Juniper, you'll wish as you wuz dead a hundred times afore you be."

"In any event," said Tom boldly enough, and without a quiver in his voice, though his scalp

tightened and his heart beat thick and fast at these words; "in any event, if you think you can carry out any such high-handed piece of business as this without suffering for it, you're badly mistaken."

Simon Lake laughed. His mirth was not pleasant to hear.

"We're in the twentieth century, recollect," added Tom. "There is such a thing as law and order. Seattle is not so very far away. Port Townsend, too. There are police there, and the means to make you suffer."

"Wa-al, d'ye hear thet, Zeb?" asked Bully Banjo, turning to his mate. "I kinder kalkerlate thet is ther all-firedest best joke I've hearn since Heck wuz a pup. By Juniper, boy," he went on impressively, "ther ain't no law made kin touch me. Understand? No law made. They're welcome ter try ef they want ter. You kin see fer yourselves thet nobody wouldn't find this place unless they knowed the way, and nobody's not never goin' ter diskiver it 'cept those who I've a mind shall. Na-ow air yer goin' ter tell me

wot Chillingworth hez done in ther matter of tryin' ter bring me up with a short tun?"

"No. I am not," replied Tom firmly. "That is Mr. Chillingworth's business. Why do you ask us about it? We are only out here as his guests. We know nothing about your ras——" "Rascality" Tom was going to say, but thought better of it and substituted: "Goings on."

Lake smiled unpleasantly. His fingers closed suggestively around his knife.

"Yer seem ter cle'n plum everlastingly fergit thet I kin find out all I want ter know frum thet Chink thar," he snapped suddenly, pointing to Fu, who stood apart with his tall countryman. The two seemed to be talking earnestly. As Lake turned, the tall Mongolian hastened toward him. It was as if he had overheard him, although that at the distance which he had been standing would have been impossible.

"That fellow yonder," he said, speaking slowly, but using good English, "that fellow yonder," pointing to Fu, "tells me that these boys and their companions were anchored on a sloop in the cove

last night. They saw the burials and overheard some of our talk."

Lake's face grew black, as if a thundercloud had settled on it. Zeb Hunt exclaimed angrily. The men standing about began to mutter. Tom saw that the frightened Fu must have told everything.

"Is this true?" demanded Lake, turning to the boys.

"I suppose so," rejoined Tom doggedly. He felt a helpless sense that there was no use in denying it.

"Thet means jes' so much more ammernition in Chillingworth's hands," mused Lake slowly. "Consarn him! Why kain't he fall inter line like the other ranchers? I don't hev no trouble with them. I pay fer what I git, cash daown on the nail, an' no questions asked. By Juniper, it's funny ter me the way Chillingworth acts."

"We've got to get the whip hand of him sooner or later," struck in Zeb Hunt. "Why not now?"

"How d'ye mean, Zeb?" asked the lanky Bully

Banjo, turning quickly on him as a man who is ready to grasp at any suggestion.

"What I mean is jest this: We've got these two kids here and the Chink—though the Chink don't count. But don't yer see thet as long ez we hold ther kids, we kin dictate terms. Ef Chillingworth gets cantankerous—biff!—one of the kids is sniffed out."

This amiable plan was proposed in a calm way that alarmed the boys far more than if vehemence had been used. They saw that logically to keep them prisoners was the only thing for the gang to do.

Nevertheless, he hung on Simon Lake's next words. They were not long in coming.

"Zeb," he said approvingly, "I allers said yer hed a long haid. Now, by Chowder, I knows it. Thet's a right smart idee. Here, Death, and you, too, Squinty, take charge of these kids, feed 'em well, but I'll hold you responsible fer 'em. Take 'em away. I'll make up my mind later what we'll do with 'em."

Then, apparently noticing Tom's start at the

ominous name of one of the worthies who came forward at the word of command, the mighty Bully Banjo condescended to explain:

"Death's right name is 'Death on the Trail.' He's a Chinook, and ef you cut up any didoes, ye'll find he's well named."

The man named Death was a tall, dark-skinned fellow, clad in a buckskin coat and ragged trousers. His companion wore mackinacks and cowhide boots. Both had on ragged sombreros.

"Come on," said Death, motioning to the boys.

Squinty said nothing, but his crossed eyes glinted malevolently as he produced two coils of rawhide rope.

Boiling with indignation and likewise considerably alarmed, the two boys had to submit to the indignity of being tied in the ropes till they resembled two packages bound securely round and round with twine. Like lifeless packages, too, they were presently picked up and helplessly borne toward the rear of the camp.

The cliff face towered for some distance above the base of the narrow valley at this point, and

at its foot the boys, as they were bundled along, noticed a dark fissure. Tom judged it to be the mouth of a cave. He was right. And in a few minutes he learned also that it was to fulfill another purpose—that of a prison.

Death and Squinty set down their burdens at the entrance, and then rolled them inside just as if they had been bales of inanimate goods of some kind. The boys' feelings were not soothed by the fact that fully a score of chattering, grinning Chinese watched the operation. These fellows were quartered back of the camp, and evidently formed a part of the consignment brought in on the schooner the night before.

The cave did not extend very far back in the rock face, and was narrow and low. But there was plenty of room in its narrow confines for two lads, bound as they were. Their two jailers shoved them as far in as possible and then without a word left them. Or so it seemed, but Tom's eyes—about the only part of his body he could move—presently lit on a motionless figure sitting smoking on a rock near the cave entrance.

It was Death. A long rifle across his knees showed that he was acting as sentinel.

"Jack, old boy," said Tom, at length, "how are you coming along?"

"As well as can be expected, as they say when a fellow's been given up for dead and buried," chuckled Jack.

His tone and words cheered Tom mightily. His brother, then, still retained his spirits, and hopeless as their position seemed that was something.

"Looks pretty bad, Tom," said Jack presently. "I wish we could have got that medicine through to uncle."

"So do I," agreed Tom. "So far as this imprisonment is concerned, I imagine they will only keep us here till they get Chillingworth's promise to let up on them."

"But if he won't give it?" demanded Jack. "He didn't strike me as the kind of man to——"

"Hark!" exclaimed Tom, interrupting him. "What's that—music?"

Music it was. The strumming of a banjo, played with consummate skill.

Presently, too, a voice struck in. It was nasal and penetrating, offering a sharp contrast to the real skill of the banjo player:

"I sailed away in sixty-four,
In the Nancy brig from the Yankee shore;
We sailed and we sailed in sun and squall;
Fer traders' gold where the South Seas fall;
Tip away—tip away—where the So-uth Seas
fa-all!"

CHAPTER IX.

FAST IN THE TOILS.

An hour or so later the lads were much astonished when Squinty entered the cave and, bending over them, rapidly loosened their bonds. So tightly had they been triced up, however, that it was some time before the stiffness was sufficiently out of their limbs to enable them to move with freedom. While they were "limbering up" their guardians allowed them to emerge from the cave and move and chafe their sore, aching limbs, at liberty. But, although it was pleasant to feel free once more—so far as their manacles went, that is—the boys did not by any means relish the surrounding crowd of Chinamen and rough-looking white men, the latter of whom indulged in some coarse jests at their expense.

At length, however, they were so far relieved from their cramped pains and "pins and needles" that they were able to stand upright and walk

about without much difficulty. As soon as their guardians saw this they roughly ordered them to march in front of them toward the tent where they had had their first sight of Bully Banjo.

He was still sitting there as they were escorted up, and was deep in consultation with the tall Chinaman and the scrubby-haired man, whom we know as Zeb Hunt. Apparently the subjects of the consultation had been the boys, for as Death and Squinty marched them up Simon Lake looked up from a stick he had been industriously whittling, and turned to his companions with a quick "hush."

"Waal," said he, as the boys came to a halt, "you've bin doin's some putty tall thinkin', I kalkerlate."

"Why," rejoined Tom boldly, "I guess those cords were tied a little too tight for our thoughts to circulate very freely."

He had determined not to let this ruffian see that he had caused them to fear him—an effect which he was evidently desirous of producing.

"Putty good!" chuckled Simon, seemingly

pleased at Tom's pleasantry. "You're ez bright ez a new dollar, bye. Anybody kin see that. But thet ain't what I wants ter talk ter yer about. Wot I wants to know is how you'll regard a little proposition I'm goin' ter make ter yer."

Tom could not check his look of astonishment at this, while, as for Jack, his eyes seemed to start out of his head. Lake's tone had become friendly, even confidential. But it did not fool either of the boys for a minute.

"What new bit of villainy is he going to spring?" wondered Tom. Aloud he said:

"What is your proposition?"

"Waal," drawled Lake, "in the fust place, it's a chance fer you byes ter make some easy money, then in the second, it's a job that won't require hardly any work on your parts."

"Well, what is it?" demanded Tom bluntly.

"Jes' this," spoke Simon Lake. "It's important fer me ter hev Chillingworth out uv ther way fer a day er two. Now I want yer to write him a note at my dictation, telling him ther fix yer in, an' askin' him ter come an' get yer. You kin tell

him thet we've left you prisoners right here or any other place whar it'll take him some time to look yer up."

"I hardly understand——" began Tom.

"Then yer ain't ez bright ez I thought yer," snarled Lake. "See here, s'pose you do as I say —waal, it'll take Chillingworth a little time ter find yer, won't it, pervided you lay low and don't go lookin' fer him?"

"Of course, but——"

"Waal, in the meantime," went on Lake, as if the matter were already settled, "I'll be putting through my little bit of business. It will take me near Chillingworth's ranch, and I don't want him ter be near while it's going on—savvy?"

"I 'savvy' this much," said Tom indignantly, "that you wish us to betray our friends so that you may be able to carry on your illegal business."

Lake's brow grew dark and lowering.

"Thet's a bad tone ter adopt with me, bud," he said slowly, "an' you ain't in any position ter dictate terms ter us—be yer?"

"Of course not," struck in Jack, "but just the same, we aren't in a position where you are going to get us to do your dirty work."

"Wow!" howled Zeb Hunt, capering about and slapping his knees with his big gnarled hands. "Hear the young turkey gobble. My! ain't he a fine young bird."

"Shet yer mouth, Zeb," snarled Lake. Zeb instantly relapsed into silence. Under other circumstances it would have been amusing to the boys to notice how suddenly his jaw fell, and the laugh left his features. Now, however, it was just the reverse. It demonstrated how thoroughly the rascal had the members of his band under his control.

"Waal," resumed the Yankee slowly, and fixing his eyes in a cold stare on the boys, "you've hearn what I hed ter say. Thar's fifty dollars in it fer yer ef you'll write the notes. I'd hev writ 'em myself," he unblushingly went on, "but I ain't no hand with a pen, and neither is none of ther others. 'Tain't as if ther wuz anything crooked in et," he went on persuasively, "it's jes'

ter keep er man out uv ther way fer a day er two. I'll leave yer with plenty of provisions an' Death ter look arter you. When yer friends git near Death he'll vamoose an' join me at a place he knows uv. I'll be fur away by thet time."

"You seem to have it all figured out," said Tom dryly.

"Yew bate. Us daown easters is right smart at sich things, by Juniper."

"There's only one thing you have omitted in your calculations."

"What's thet, young feller?"

"That your whole scheme depends on our falling in with it."

"Waal, yew do, don't ye?"

"Not in the longest day you ever lived, Simon Lake."

"Nor for more money than you ever saw."

The boys' answers came like two pistol shots.

Lake, all pretense at good feeling over now, jumped to his feet. A look of furious rage came over his lean features. His gray eyes blazed like twin points of fire.

"So thet's yer answer, is it?" he shouted. "Waal, I've bin Simon Lake ter you boys heretofore. Now, by Chowder, you'll see ther Bully Banjo part of me. Here, Death, an' you, too, Squinty—take these kids back ter ther cave. Guard 'em close. I'll hold you responsible fer them, an' heaven hev mercy on yer soul ef they git away. We'll see how——"

There came a sudden crackling in the brush behind them. Lake faced round with a motion swift as a wild cat. Zeb Hunt and one or two of the others seized their rifles and plunged off into the underbrush. It was evident that they suspected that a concealed spy had caused the noise.

"Bring him out," roared Bully Banjo. "I'll use his hide fer a banjo head, by Chowder!"

But after a quarter of an hour or so, the others returned and reported that they had been unable to find anything. The noise must have been made by some wild animal they declared. At any rate, there was no trace of a human being in the undergrowth.

Much relieved, apparently, Lake ordered the

boys taken off to the cave. A few minutes later they were once more in their place of captivity. But this time only their hands and ankles were manacled. But even had their limbs been free, it would have been madness even to dream of escaping, for in front of the cave Death, as remorseless as his namesake, and the sinister Squinty kept watch. Squatting on rocks, their pipes between their teeth and their rifles held loosely on their knees, not a movement of the boy prisoners escaped them.

Evidently, Bully Banjo's words were law, to be carried out to the letter. Such, at least, would have been gathered from the grim relentless manner in which Death and his companion mounted guard over that cave.

Of what fate Simon Lake had in store for them, of course, the boys could not form the remotest idea, but apparently he meant to keep them in his power till such time as he was certain that he could use them as a power against Chillingworth, whom he rightly felt was the most inex-

orable enemy he had among the weak-spirited ranchers.

In low tones Jack and Tom discussed the situation, and their guards made no objection to their doing so, apparently. At least, they made no move to interfere. No doubt the boys were not watched so closely as grown men would have been. What could two bound lads do, their guards reasoned. It was not long before they were due to have a striking illustration of what such lads as the Bungalow Boys were capable of.

According to Tom's way of thinking, Bully Banjo would keep them in the cavern till he and his lieutenants could decide on some way in which they could be used to keep Chillingworth out of the way while Lake ran his Chinamen through by the convenient trail which cut across one corner of the Chillingworth ranch. Of what this way was to be they could not, naturally, form any idea. Possibly, they figured out, it might be by means of a decoy note.

At all events, situated as they were, neither lad was in a mood to waste time on speculation.

Rather did they devote their mental efforts to figuring out some way of escape. But, try as they would, they could think of none.

At dusk Squinty was relieved on guard by another of the band—a man of even more sinister appearance than he himself,—a fellow with a big bottle nose and red, inflamed features. He had the besotted, foolish look of a man who is given to yielding to a passion for drink. He brought with him some tin dishes—or rather two tin bowls, and a pair of tin cups. The former contained a kind of stew with a big hunk of bread stuck on one side of the receptacle. The cups were filled with steaming coffee. The newcomer and Death silently released the boys' hands so that they could eat. While they satisfied their appetites, which by this time were rather sharp, Tom wished devoutly that among the "table furnishings" there had been two knives. He would have risked the attempt to conceal one of them. But, to his disappointment, the meal was served with spoons as the only means of conveying the

eatables to the mouth. So that plan was nipped in the bud.

Death and the red-faced man talked in low tones while the boys ate. Apparently the latter was trying to induce the Indian to perform some service for him which the other was unwilling to undertake. At last, however, he appeared to yield, and the boys saw the red-faced individual slip something that looked like money into the Indian's hand. The latter shambled off and shortly reappeared with a round bottle covered with wicker, which he handed to the red-faced man. The bottle appeared to have come from the quarters of the Chinamen, for that was the direction in which the Indian had gone on his errand.

Supper over, the tin dishes were removed, and the boys' hands tied once more. They tried to ask some questions, but were cut short with growls from both their guardians. They sat silently wondering how things were going forward with their uncle and Mr. Chillingworth, as the dark rushed on.

Before long the canyon was enveloped in a

gray gloom, which presently became black night. Far above them—seen as if from the bottom of a pit—were stars, shining brightly, and with an irritating sense of freedom. The boys had crawled to the cavern mouth to make these observations, but Death and his companion forced them back. As darkness fell, from the camp they could hear the "Plunk-a-plunka-plunk" of Simon Lake's banjo. The rascal's harsh voice, too, reached them, crooning out apparently sentimental songs of the cheap music-hall variety.

It grew chilly as the evening wore on. A sea wind laden with a penetrating dampness swept up the canyon. It moaned in a dismal fashion in the black pine woods. Death and the red-nosed man dragged wood to the cave mouth and made a fire. When it was kindled they sat by it hugging their knees, their rifles between their legs, and staring moodily into the glowing embers. Every now and then the Indian would rise to get more wood. At such times he would take a perfunctory glance into the cave to see how his charges were faring.

When he did this the red-nosed took advantage of the other's back being turned to raise the bottle to his lips and take a long draught. Presently he offered the bottle to the Indian. The Chinook silently took a long drink and handed it back. This performance was repeated several times.

By the time the last tinkle of the plaintive banjo had died out and silence reigned among the chattering Chinamen, both the Indian and the red-nosed man appeared to have difficulty in keeping awake. Presently the latter began to nod. He dozed off two or three times, awakening with a start. Before long he was off in real earnest. His head lolled forward on his chest, his mouth flopped open supinely. He lurched down, huddled in a heap, a degrading spectacle. The potent effect of what he had consumed overcame the Indian more slowly. Before he gave himself up to sleep, in fact, he entered the cave and felt the boys' ropes carefully. Then apparently, to make sure they were all secure, he strode off toward the main camp and presently returned with more

rope. With this he made additional thongs. Then with a grunt of satisfaction he left the cave, and, after a cautious look about him, he, too, laid himself down in front of the fire and presently his wary, beady eyes closed. The Chinese liquor, strong, sleep-inducing, and wit-benumbing, had overtaken him, too.

"Oh, if only we had a knife," sighed Tom, "we could make a dash for it now."

"You bet we would," cried Jack. "All they could do would be to fire after us, and they'd stand little chance of hitting us in the dark."

"Well, no good wishing," sighed Tom. "Here we are now, tied up tighter than ever, and——"

A small stone fell in front of the cave. In the silence, broken only by the murmur of the stream and the sighing of the wind in the pines it sounded as startlingly loud as a rifle shot. Presently another fell.

Could it be a signal of some kind?

But suppose it was—who could it be? Certainly not Mr. Chillingworth or the boys' uncle, or——

At this point of Tom's meditations another small stone fell. There could no longer be any doubt. Somebody on the cliff above was trying to attract their attention. But there did not seem to be any way of showing him that they heard and understood.

All at once, both boys, who had been painfully wiggling toward the front of the cave—moving with difficulty in their tight bonds—gave a surprised gasp.

Something that at first glance seemed like a strand of spider's web, with an immense spider hanging on the end of it, was swinging in the cave mouth, between them and the red glow of the dying watch fire.

But it was not a spider, nor a web. It was a thin string, and as Tom struggled to the front of the cave and neared the object dangling at the end of the cord, he almost fell backward with astonishment.

It was an opened clasp-knife.

CHAPTER X.

IN DIRE STRAITS.

Moving with the utmost caution so as not to arouse the sleeping Indian, Tom attempted to reach the knife with his bound hands. But he found this impossible to do. After a dozen efforts he realized that it was hopeless. It began to look as if their unknown benefactor might have striven in vain to aid them. But Tom's mind was not one to be overcome by an obstacle, however insurmountable it might seem at first blush.

Reaching forward—like a boy playing bob-cherry—he seized the knife with his teeth. Tom's ivories were white and strong and even, and holding the keen blade in his mouth he had no difficulty in sawing Jack's hands free, for the younger boy had instantly perceived, without Tom's telling him, what the other was about to do.

Of course, the thing took longer to perform

than it does to tell it here. A dozen times or more the boys interrupted themselves to look cautiously around. For all they knew there might be other guards than the sleeping Indian and his companion. But they could see none, and, as the moments went on without interruption, they grew bolder and worked more rapidly. Presently Jack was free, and, taking the knife from Tom, he at once accomplished his brother's disentanglement.

"What are we going to do now?" whispered Jack, as they stood cramped and aching, but thrilling at the same time with the sense of glorious liberty. But they were by no means at the end of their troubles yet. They had still to get out of the cave and make their way to some place of security beyond Bully Banjo's immediate grip.

Tom did not answer Jack's question immediately. Instead, he paused and an expression of deep thought came over his countenance. One by one, he ran over the various features of the locality as he recalled them. The high-sided canyon, steep as the walls of a house, and with no apparent way of reaching the summit from

below. No, there was no chance of getting away there. The river? Ah, that was better. Tom thought that by working along the edge of the stream they could reach the sea coast, or at least some point at which they could clamber back onto the trail,—possibly at the same place as that by which they had made their unfortunate excursion after water.

Rapidly and in a low whisper he conveyed his plan to Jack. The younger boy nodded, and then, as there was nothing to be gained by waiting, they started to put the daring plan into execution. But as they moved forward out of the cave Death, who, like most Indians slumbered as lightly as a cat, stirred and opened his eyes. In a flash, he saw what had happened and comprehended it.

Luckily, before he cried out to give the alarm, he reached for his rifle, which lay by his side. That instant of time was all that Tom needed. In one bound he was on the Chinook. The fellow reeled backward under his powerful blow, toppling head first into the still glowing fire. Be-

fore he could utter a cry, though, Tom was on him. The Bungalow Boy's hand was clapped over the Indian's mouth. But Tom speedily found that, though his swift attack had temporarily made him master of the situation, he was no more than a fair match for the Indian. The fellow was thin, but as tough as steel wire. He wriggled and squirmed like an acrobat under Tom's powerful grip. Fortunately, all this rolling and thrashing about brought them out of the embers, or one or the other might have been badly burned.

It was Jack who turned the balance in favor of Tom. He saw as soon as Tom sprang on the Indian that the latter was likely to prove a pretty handy man in a rough and tumble encounter, and therefore he had lost no time in dashing back into the cave and securing some of the ropes with which they themselves had been secured but a few moments before.

He returned just as the Indian, by dint of arching his back, had succeeded in momentarily casting off Tom's grip. The Bungalow Boy, taken

by surprise by the sudden spring-like upbound of the Indian, was cast clear off him, in fact. But before the Indian could take any advantage of this turn of affairs, Jack was on him. The younger Dacre boy seized the leathery-faced old rascal by the head and clapped one hand over his mouth. He realized that the most important thing to do was to keep the man from calling out and alarming the camp. Tom speedily recovered himself, and, coming to Jack's aid, it was not long before they had the Chinook as securely tied and bound as they themselves had been. Ripping off a portion of his blue-flannel shirt, Tom stuffed it in the fellow's mouth to serve as a gag. They then bundled him into the cave and started for the river. There was no difficulty in locating it. The roar of its dashing waters as they rushed on to the sea betrayed its whereabouts.

But, unfortunately, during the battle something had occurred which they had not foreseen. The red-faced man had slumbered serenely through it all. But, unseen by either of the boys during the struggle in the embers, a glowing

brand had been cast upon his clothes. This had burned steadily on, fanned by the wind which swept through the canyon. Just as the boys vanished in the black shadows toward the river, the smoldering flame reached his flesh. With a yell, he wakened, on the alert in an instant, his slumber having cleared his fuddled brain of the effects of his carouse.

It took him scarcely a longer time than it had the Indian to perceive what had occurred. His first yell of pain had aroused the camp. Before the befuddled, red-faced individual had regained his wits entirely, the place was humming like an angry beehive.

With long-legged leaps, Simon Lake came bounding into the circle of light formed by the scattered embers.

"What in tarnation's the matter, Tarbox, yer red-faced codfish?" he shouted.

"Matter enough," roared back Zeb Hunt, who had been doing some rapid investigating. "Them boys has got away."

"Got away!" echoed Simon Lake furiously, yet incredulously.

"Yep. Death's trussed up like a Christmas turkey back thar in ther cave, an' ther young varmints hes vamoosed."

"Scatter, boys! After 'em!" bellowed Lake. "By Juniper, I'll give a hundred dollars to the one that gets 'em."

"Alive or dead?" asked one ruffian, with an ugly scar running from brow to chin down his weather-beaten face.

"Yes," snarled Lake, "alive or dead. They know too much fer me ter lose 'em now. And then if they git loose all our plans go ter tarnation smash. Go on, Zeb, arter 'em. Git on the scent, my bullies. As for you," grated out Lake, casting a terrible look at poor Tarbox, who had succeeded in extinguishing his clothes, "I'll attend to you later."

The fellow sank to his knees and began quivering out pleas for mercy. But Lake turned away with a savage laugh.

"You'll blubber worse then that afor I git through with yer, by Chowder!"

As he spoke, from the direction of the river there came a sudden loud crack as if a branch had snapped under some one's foot. Lake heard it, and was quick to guess its significance.

"Ther young varmits is in ther brush yonder, byes. Git 'em out. Arter 'em. Drag 'em out of thar!"

It sounded like the master of a pack of hounds urging on his charges to their work. In obedience to Bully Banjo's shout and cries the searchers plunged into the brush, shouting and yelling to one another savagely.

Simon Lake was right when he imagined that the sudden sharp noise in the brush had been caused by the boys. It was Jack's unlucky encounter with a dead limb half buried in dried leaves and debris that had caused it. The accident could not possibly have occurred at a more unfortunate moment for the boys.

Gritty lads as they were, both of them changed color and their pulses began to beat a tattoo as

they heard the human bloodhounds break into full cry at the sound.

"Tom, I'm—I'm awfully sorry," gasped Jack contritely.

"Rubbish, old fellow. How could you help it?" rejoined Tom. "Come on, we'll beat them yet."

"How?"

The question seemed a natural one. They were still some little distance from the river, in the midst of thick underbrush through which it was hard to proceed quickly without making a noise. The outlaws, on the other hand, probably knew of trails to the river bank. They might thread these quickly and arrive there ahead of the boys.

But they kept doggedly on. Tom had given no answer to Jack's question. Time was too precious for that now, and breath, too. The great object was to reach the river bank first. Tom felt that once among its rugged rocks and intricate windings, interspersed as they were by dense brakes of brush, that they would stand at least a chance of getting away unobserved.

And now they reached the river bank.

Through the darkness they could see the water rushing whitely along. In the midst of the white smother in front of them could be seen a darker blot. Tom guessed it to be a rock in mid-stream.

As he saw it a bold idea flashed into his mind. If they could jump and gain it, perhaps there was another rock beyond to which they could jump in turn, and so cross the stream and reach the other side in safety. In a few low breathless words he confided his plan to Jack. The younger boy, however, was not impressed by it.

"It's all right for you, with your record for the broad jump, Tom," he argued. "You could make it. But I don't believe I could, and——"

There was a sudden crackling and trampling in the brush behind them.

"Here they come," exclaimed Tom. "It's now or never. Are we going to try for it or wait here to be roped like two fool calves?"

Jack drew a deep breath.

"I'll try it," he said, gritting his teeth.

"Good boy!"

Tom's hand fell with a tight squeeze on the younger lad's shoulder.

"You'll make it, never fear, Jack," he went on encouragingly, as he threw off his coat and stepped back from the bank as far as possible.

"I'll go first, and if I can make it, I'll be on the rock to help you when you come."

"But if you miss?" quavered Jack.

"But I won't miss," said Tom pluckily, although he felt by no means certain in his own mind. "I feel as confident as I did that day at Audubon when I got the broad jump away from Old Hickey. He——"

"This way, boys. I hearn the varmints not a second ago!"

The voice, raucous and savage, came behind them. Its owner was still in the brush. They could hear his heavy-footed tramplings. But it warned them that the moment for action had arrived.

With a quick run, Tom reached the bank of the stream. Then up he shot and outward over the boiling, screaming waters, and—landed on

the rock with six inches or more to spare. The great stone was wet and slippery, but he maintained his footing, and turned with a wave toward the shore.

As he did so a terrible fear shot into his heart. What if Jack's nerve failed him at the last instant? Situated as Tom was, he would be powerless to help him, for to leap back to shore again would be an impossibility. Shout encouragement he dared not. All he could do was to wait, with the river roaring in the blackness all about him.

Suddenly ashore the night was split by a red flash and a sharp report sounded above the turmoil. Jack had been sighted and they were firing at him.

"Oh, Jack, why won't you jump?"

The words were wrung from the Bungalow Boy as he stood upright on the wet rock, the spray of the racing river showering him till he was as drenched as his foothold. With burning eyes, he peered shoreward.

Suddenly over the water toward him came a figure. It was Jack. As he leaped three shots re-

sounded behind him. Tom could feel the bullets whistle by. But they hardly arrived quicker than Jack.

It was well for him that Tom was there, for Jack's jump was short. He fell, clutching at the wet rock. The water seized his legs and tried to whip him off in its mad current. But Tom's strong hands had grasped his brother's wrists before his hold gave way, and in less time than it takes to tell it Jack was beside him on the rock.

"Thank goodness, you're safe," breathed the elder lad, as Jack, panting, wet, and trembling from his exertion, stood beside him.

There was no time to exchange more words. As Tom spoke, several bullets came whizzing about them. Two or three hit the rock with a dull "pinging" sound.

Evidently their refuge had been spied from the shore and a better target than they presented it would be hard to imagine. So far the darkness had apparently intervened in their favor. Tom knew it would not protect them for long. Presently the men on shore would get the range.

He dragged Jack down till both lay flat on the rock, and together they slowly made their way across it.

Was there another such rock within jumping distance?

If there were not, the Bungalow Boys were in the most dangerous position they had ever occupied in their adventurous lives.

CHAPTER XI.

A LEAP FOR LIFE AND FREEDOM.

Proceeding thus, with their hearts almost literally in their mouths and with nerves that throbbed painfully, the boys finally reached the side of the rock removed from the shore. To Tom's huge delight, they found here, lighted dimly by a reflection from the white foam, a little ledge. By standing on this crouching as low as possible they would be safe enough from the bullets—that is, except one or more of the outlaws leaped to the rock. But this was extremely doubtful.

If two active boys like Tom and Jack Dacre had had great difficulty in doing so, it was hardly likely that the outlaws, men of irregular lives and clumsy movements, would be able to accomplish it.

A howl of surprise greeted the first knowledge the men on shore had of the disappearance of the

boys, which came when their figures suddenly vanished from the rock. The general consensus of opinion following that was that they had fallen off and been swept to death in the swift current.

But an old fox like Bully Banjo was not the sort of man to leave the bank on that account. On the contrary, he determined to wait till daylight if necessary, and at that time he settled within himself, he would make certain if the boys had really drowned or if they had only found a spot on the rock where they could not be seen from the shore.

He ordered no move, but that the rock was to be watched, however. And so, in silent, dogged determination, the outlaws sat down to await the coming of the day. At last it began to grow faintly, dimly light. A nebulous chilly glow diffused itself through the canyon, bringing out its rough walls and their ragged, towering groups of pines and other conifers.

With the coming of day the men on the shore began to stir. Parties walked off along the rim

of the stream in either direction, their purpose being to find, if possible, some trace of the boys.

In the meantime, the coming of the light had not, as Tom had hoped, revealed another rock between the one on which they stood and the shore. Instead, thirty feet or more of raging and, apparently, deep water lay between them and the other bank. It was impossible to jump it and already they were growing weak and faint from exposure and suspense.

The ledge was narrow, too, and slippery, and it was no small exertion in itself to keep a foothold on it for the length of time to which the lads had clung there. Both of them felt that they had almost reached the limit of their endurance. But neither of them wanted to admit it just then.

"I reckon they think ashore that we have drowned," said Tom, at length, rightly fathoming the surmises of Simon Lake's men. "If they knew what a fix we are in, they would start peppering again, I'll bet."

"To tell the truth," said Jack, "I don't see that we are in a much better position than we would

be if we were ashore. We can tell by the voices that Lake's men are on watch for us. If we show ourselves, it will be the signal for a fusillade."

Tom shook his head.

"I don't think so," he said.

"Well, why not? They have us at their mercy."

"That is just it," responded Tom soberly. "As soon as we show ourselves, they will, of course, know that we are not drowned. That being the case, all they have got to do is to keep the rock covered. Why, if they want to, they could keep us here till starvation finishes us off."

"Unless we swim for it," put in Jack.

"Swim for it?" Tom laughed grimly, and pointed to the water about them. "How long could a fellow last in that?"

"Well, I'd try it before I'd give Lake the satisfaction of starving us out," responded Jack grittily.

"Same here," replied Tom, "but I've got another plan in my head. The only thing is I don't

know if the means for working it out will come along before we drop off here from starvation."

"You don't mean that you've figured out a way of getting off here?" gasped Jack.

"I have," rejoined Tom, "but it's a very remote chance that it will be successful. It depends on so many things."

"Say," demanded Jack, "you're not thinking of trying the jump to the other bank—you'd never make it."

"I know that. So we'll just hang on here and wait for the one chance in a hundred that I'm looking for."

"And that is——"

"Well, you've noticed the logs that have been drifting by since it's got daylight?"

"Yes."

"Well, some of them have come quite close to this rock. If the worst comes to the worst——"

"It's done that already," interrupted Jack.

"I agree with you. But why couldn't we grab one and trust to luck to its floating us out of here?"

Jack gave a delighted cry. The water was roaring so loud that it was not necessary to observe caution about noise.

"Tom, old fellow, you are a wonder!" he exclaimed. "Why on earth didn't I think of that? It's the very thing if——"

His face grew suddenly sober as he thought how much depended on that "if."

"If the one chance in a hundred happens," said Tom, gazing steadily up stream, "and, Jack, old boy, I believe that it is."

"What!"

"Look up yonder, what's that coming down the river?"

"Looks like a whole tree. It must have been uprooted in a freshet. Yes—it is a tree."

"No, it isn't, either."

Jack looked at his brother in some amazement, but despite the seriousness of their predicament, he could not help smiling as the other went on:

"If things go right, that's our boat."

Breathlessly they watched the drifting tree as it was borne toward them on the crest of the cur-

rent. It was a fairly large one, with a mass of roots sticking up at one end. Despite its size, the stream was carrying it along as if it had been a straw.

Almost before they knew it, the trunk was within a few feet of them.

"When I shout, don't hesitate," warned Tom, "for we'll only have a second in which to act, and it's our only chance."

Jack nodded. With beating hearts and dry mouths, they watched the oncoming trunk. Suddenly it was borne off toward the other bank, out of all reach. A groan from Jack. But an eddy caught it the next instant and sent it hurling back again.

"It's driving straight for us," whispered Jack hoarsely.

Tom said nothing, but nodded to show he heard.

On came the tree, but as it was within a hand's breadth of the rock, another eddy caught it and sent it staggering off again toward the other

bank. But the boys were not going to be defeated by such an accident as that.

Bracing themselves, but still crouching so that their heads did not show above the rock, they jumped and landed in the tangle of roots. But, as might have been expected, their sudden weight had the effect of rolling the tree over. Submerged in the boiling current the two boys were hurried along.

Neither of them could tell you to this day how they escaped drowning, but they did.

Breathless, bruised, and with their clothes half torn from their backs, they succeeded in crawling around the roots till their heads were above the water. Helping each other, they struggled like two half-drowned flies till they succeeded in throwing themselves across the log so that it would not tip over completely. From time to time, though, it gave a lurch that threatened to topple them off altogether.

And so, half in and half out of the water, they shot from behind the shelter of the rock.

"Ther they be!" the shout went up from the

shore, as Zeb Hunt's sharp eyes espied the two clinging, half-submerged figures.

"The foxy young varmints! Let 'em hev it, byes!" yelled Simon Lake furiously.

But as the rifles were aimed, the tree was swung almost completely around by a sudden swing of the current, and the boys were borne out of range. The thick tangle of the roots hid them from the marksmen ashore.

The next instant, however, the capricious stream swung the log about once more. Instantly the white, racing water was flecked with bullets. Splinters from the ones which struck the tree showered about the boys. But either owing to the excitement of the riflemen, or to the erratic motions of the tree as it was tumbled along by the current, none of the bullets injured them. The next minute they would have been round a bend in the stream and safe from the rifles—at least, temporarily, when something occurred that made their hearts sink like lead.

The tree, which had been hitherto borne swiftly

along, although in an eccentric course, grated, bumped, and then came to a stop.

A triumphant yell went up from the watchers on the shore as they saw it. They came running along the bank so as to pour in their fire from a position exactly opposite to the stranded tree.

"Quick, get round to the other side," choked out Tom, blowing a stream of water out of his mouth.

Hand over hand among the roots, the lads at last succeeded in gaining the other side of the trunk. This put a thick barricade of solid timber between themselves and the riflemen.

"Now put your foot in the water and shove," ordered Tom, suiting the action to the word. "This log is only stuck on a shoal. I think we can get her over if we try hard."

They shoved till their muscles cracked, and at last, partly by their efforts and partly by the weight of the dammed-up water behind it, the great log quivered and then moved on.

This time it plunged into a deep, rapid pool that soon hurried it on, and almost before the

boys knew it the shouts and shots behind them grew faint and then fainter, and finally died out altogether. Then, and only then, did they dare to raise themselves from their uncomfortable, not to say perilous, nooks among the roots and look out.

The first object Tom's eyes fell upon was one calculated to make him withdraw his head instantly, like a turtle retreating into his shell.

The stream narrowed just ahead of them and roared between two walls of rock. On the summit of one of these rocks, standing where they must pass directly under him, was the sharply silhouetted figure of a man.

In his hands he grasped a rifle, seemingly ready for immediate action.

CHAPTER XII.

SAM HARTLEY TURNS UP.

If the figure proved to be one of the outposts of Simon Lake's camp, the situation was a serious one. In a few moments the big tree would reach the narrow passage in the rocks. When it did, two courses were open to the boys. One was to stick to it and throw themselves and their fate upon providence, or else make a leap for the rocks which were seamed and scarred. But in the event of the motionless figure on the rock proving to be an enemy, their position would be as bad as before. Unarmed as they were, they would certainly have to give in without a struggle.

But just as Tom had about decided that their best plan would be to cling to the tree and trust to luck to get safely through the narrow "gate," something familiar struck him about the figure. It was that of a sun-burned man of middle age,

clean-shaven, and with a conveying sense of alertness in his erect pose. He wore khaki trousers, much the worse for wear, stout hunting boots, laced up almost to his knees, a rough blue shirt, and a big sombrero.

In a flash it came across Tom where they had seen that figure before.

Another instant made the conviction a certainty.

The man was Sam Hartley. If any question had remained of it, all doubt was once and for all removed, as Tom decided to risk a mistake and hailed the man.

"Sam! Oh, Sam!"

The man on the rock started. His rifle, which had come up to his arm pit as the boy hailed, fell back. He stared before him intently as the tree came bumping at the rock. Before he could recover himself, from amid its roots two active young forms had leaped and hurled themselves straight at the stalwart figure of the former arch enemy of the counterfeiters of Saw Mill Valley.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Sam, as Tom stopped

wringing his hand for an instant. "It is you, all right. I thought I was pretty sure of you when I peeked into Bully Banjo's camp yesterday when he had you on the carpet."

"But, Sam," cried Tom excitedly, "what are you doing here, and——" He broke off as a sudden explanation of the mysterious arrival of the knife flashed across him.

"It was you that lowered that knife!"

"Sure," said Sam easily; "but, say, boys, we're in a bad place right here. Let's get back in the brush. I've got some grub there and a clean shirt apiece for you. I guess you're in need of both," he went on, with a smile, surveying the two dilapidated young figures.

"That's right. Especially the grub part of it," laughed Tom. "But, Sam, I can't get over the mystery of it. You being here and arriving just in time to help us out of what seemed such a dickens of a mess."

Yet it was simple enough as Sam explained to them a few moments later. He had been in Seattle when Mr. Chillingworth's letter reached the

Secret Service Department in Washington. His chief at the capital city had at once wired him in cipher to drop the case he was on and proceed with all haste to the neighborhood of the Chillingworth ranch.

In the guise of a prospector, Sam had been in the hills for some days, and, by a stroke of luck, he had encountered the day before the trail of the men he was after. An unlucky slip had betrayed his presence in the brush. It was that disturbance, it will be recalled, that had so excited Bully Banjo and his men.

He had seen and heard enough from his place of concealment, however, to know that two boys were in trouble, and it was no part of Sam Hartley's nature not to try and help them. From various points of vantage among the rocks and trees on the cliffside he had watched all that had taken place subsequently in the camp of Bully Banjo.

After revolving one or two plans of rescue, it had occurred to him that his best plan would be to lower the knife, which the boys had put to such

excellent use. From his eyrie high up on the cliffside above the cavern, he had later heard the shots at the river edge, and had surmised what was taking place. He had concluded, though, that the boys had been shot and killed as they reached the water, and had left the place while it was still dark, with a heavy heart.

What he had seen had enraged him still more against the men he had been sent to track, and he had made all haste back to his camp which was back of the "gate" in the rocks. It had occurred to him after his arrival there, though, that in the event of the boys having been killed their bodies might be carried down by the current. He had therefore posted himself by the narrow gateway in order to watch for them. His amazement when he encountered the Bungalow Boys safe and sound on their queer raft was only equaled by his delight.

To the readers of the "Bungalow Boys," the first volume of this series, Sam Hartley will need no further introduction. Our other readers may be informed, however, that Sam was one of the

"star men" of the Secret Service bureau in Washington, and that the boys had made his acquaintance at the Maine bungalow.

Sam, in disguise, was there for the purpose of getting evidence against the Trullibers in much the same manner as he was now after the defiant Bully Banjo. It will be recalled by our old readers that the boys had been of great service to Sam Hartley, aiding him in running down the Trullibers, and that he in his turn had been able to do them some services. How glad they were to meet each other once more under such odd—yet such entirely natural circumstances, when they came to be explained—may be better imagined than detailed.

"And now," said Sam, when all had been said and explained, and the boys' hunger fully satisfied, "what are you lads going to do?"

"Push on to the ranch, of course," declared Tom. "It is important that we should get the medicines for Mr. Dacre without delay."

"I agree with you," said Sam, "and as it's not much use my trailing those fellows any more—

they'll be away from there by now—I'll go with you."

"But then you'll lose them altogether," exclaimed Tom.

Sam laughed his light, cheery laugh.

"No fear of that, boy," he said. "I know where their schooner is, and I'll get them yet, just keep tabs of that. In any event, I don't want to be in any hurry. I'm going to give this Bully Banjo all the rope he wants, and then round him and his gang up when he least expects it."

"All by yourself?" asked Jack amazedly.

Sam laughed again.

"Well, hardly," he said. "It will take a dozen or more of us to handle that job when the time comes. But in the meantime I don't want to give him any idea that he is being watched or that the Secret Service is after him. That's the way we always do things—wait till we are ready and the plum's right for picking, and then go and get it with neatness and dispatch."

"That's why you didn't let Mr. Chillingworth know you were in the vicinity, then?" cried Tom.

"That's it," agreed Sam Hartley. "You see, I figured that they were likely to be watching his place, and so I gave it a wide berth. But I guess there's no harm in showing myself to him now. It's evident that Bully Banjo doesn't fear anything, or he'd not be running the Chinks through so boldly."

Sam walked off into the brush a little way and soon reappeared with a small burro. Helped by the boys, he loaded his cooking utensils and other camping apparatus on the little creature's back and then they set off through the brush, headed for a trail of which Sam knew. It was characteristic of Sam Hartley that already he was more familiar with the country about than most of the ranchers.

"There's one thing that puzzles me, though," he said, "and that is how those fellows ever get into the canyon yonder from the sea."

"Why they come in by a trail, don't they?" asked Jack innocently.

"Oh, no they don't, for I watched them pretty sharply. I'm willing to swear that they didn't

come in by any trail. No, sir," grunted Sam, with an air of conviction. "Either those rascals have an airship or else they travel under ground."

"Well, they haven't got an airship, that's certain," laughed Tom.

"That's right," agreed the detective; "therefore, they come under the ridge of hills that separates the canyon from the sea. But how—well, I'll tell you," he went on, without waiting for the boys to speak. "My theory is that this river burrows its way under that ridge, and that the rascals have some sort of a tunnel there they get through."

"Do you really think so?" asked Tom, rather frankly incredulous.

"I do. It sounds wild, I admit, but how else are you to account for it. After all, there's nothing very uncommon in rivers running under a range of hills. Why's there's one does it right up at my old home in New York State, and in California, and all through the west there are any amount of such waterways. The only real novelty in it is the fact that these rascals have

been able to use it as a short cut to this canyon. At any rate, I'm going to explore it some day when I get time."

"And shut them off from it?" asked Jack.

"Well, it might come in handy to use as a trap," mused Sam Hartley. "But it's no use figuring so far ahead till we know if there is such a thing in existence."

"That's right," agreed the boys, and for some time after that they were far too busy getting through the close-growing brush to do much talking. At last they emerged, as Sam had foretold they would, on a rough trail, not unlike the one by which they had traveled into so much unlooked-for trouble.

"Now, then," said Sam, "the next thing is to locate the Chillingworth ranch. We can't be so awfully far from it."

"How are we ever going to get a line on it," wondered Jack, "I'm all twisted about now."

But Tom who had observed Sam Hartley's way of doing things on more than one previous occasion, said nothing. He just watched Sam as

the latter tied the burro to a tree, and then, diving into the pocket of his mackintosh coat, produced a map. From its grimy condition it seemed to have been well handled. Along the edges of the folds it was torn by much folding and unfolding.

Selecting a flat rock, Sam spread the map out and the boys saw that it was a rough "sketch," one drawn with pen and ink. Several places on it were marked in red ink. Sam laid a finger on one of these and remarked briefly:

"Chillingworth's."

"I don't see how that helps," began Jack, but a look from Tom stopped him, and presently he was glad he had not said more, for Sam produced a compass and a pair of parallel rulers. Gazing carefully over the map, he picked out a spot which he said was approximately the one on which they then stood. He then laid the rulers from that spot to the red-inked portion of the map representing Mr. Chillingworth's place.

"A straight course, almost due northeast from here, and we'll hit it," he decided, folding the rul-

ers and putting them carefully away. Then he methodically replaced the map in its envelope.

A few minutes later they set out on the course Sam had outlined. He planned to travel across country, the sure-footed burro being as much at home on the rough mountainside as on a trail.

"Lay hold of the ropes at the side of the pack if you get tired," he advised the boys. "You'll find it helps a lot."

After an hour's traveling, of a sort to which they had never been accustomed, the boys were glad to accept this advice, and found themselves greatly aided.

Their way lay over bowlder-strewn ground, under towering columnar trunks of great trees of the pine tribe. The lofty conifers entwined their dark branches high in the air, making the forest floor beneath cool and dim.

It was noon when Sam Hartley, consulting map and compass once more, struck off to the east.

"We ought to be there in ten minutes," he said, without a trace of hesitation in his tone. A sea captain could not have been more confident of

bringing his vessel across the ocean into a designated port than Sam was of landing in the exact spot for which he had laid his calculations.

As a matter of fact, it was half an hour before they emerged from the pine woods into a clearing littered with stumps and blackened trunks. Before them was a half-grown corn field, and traces of cultivation were all about them. In a roughly fenced pasture lot—cleared like the rest from the virgin forest—were some cattle and horses.

Across the corn field could be seen a long, low house of logs, with a rough-shingled roof. A little distance from it were some barns painted a dull red and made of undressed lumber, and a big corral with a hay stack in the center of it.

As they struck out, skirting the edge of the corn field, toward the house, the death-like quiet that had reigned about it was ruefully broken. From behind one of the barns there suddenly emerged a blue-bloused figure from whose head a pigtail stuck out behind as it flew along. Hardly had the new arrivals taken in this, before, behind

the Chinaman, came a second figure, that of a woman in a blue sun bonnet and a pink print dress. They could see that she had a rifle in her hands, and as they watched she raised it and fired after the retreating Chinaman.

But she did not hit him, apparently—even if such had been her intention—for he kept straight on and vanished in an instant in the dark woods at the edge of the clearing.

"Gee whiz!" exclaimed Sam Hartley, hastening forward. "What's the meaning of this drama?"

The words had hardly left his lips, before the woman who had put the Chinaman to such precipitate flight espied the approach of the newcomers.

They were about to hail her when, to their amazement, she raised her rifle to her shoulder once more. This time it was most unmistakably trained upon them and the good-looking face behind the sights bore an expression that seemed to say as plain as print:

"Don't come any nearer if you want to avoid trouble."

CHAPTER XIII.

A NOTE OF WARNING.

A comical expression came over Sam Hartley's face. He saw at once that the woman mistook them for enemies—possibly allies of the Chinaman whom, for some good reason apparently, she had just chased off the place.

"Hold on there, madam," he cried, "we're not here on any harm. The lads have a message to you from your husband."

"Yes, our names are Dacre——"

"For gracious sakes, why didn't you say so in the first place?" demanded the woman, putting down her rifle and smiling pleasantly.

"Well, you see," spoke Sam, with a whimsical intonation, "you didn't give us a chance."

Whereat they all had to break into a laugh, the situation seemed so ridiculous.

"As I suppose you have guessed," said the woman, "I am Mrs. Chillingworth. That China-

man you just saw heading off the place I caught hanging round the barn a few moments ago. He was nailing a paper up there. Here it is. Look at it and tell me what you make of it."

She drew from her apron pocket a bit of paper on which the following was scrawled in a straggly hand:

"Chillingworth: You se what thee byes got. That waz onli a sampil. A Word to the Wize is Enuff. Live and Let Live."

Sam Hartley's face grew grave as he read, with the boys peering over his elbow.

"I suspected something like this," he said, "but I thought we would have reached here ahead of them. I reckon that Chinaman must have known the country hereabouts as well as I did, or better."

"Well, I allow he ought to," said Mrs. Chillingworth. "His name is Fu. He worked for my husband, and you can imagine how mystified I was when I came out a short while ago and found him sneaking round the house like a criminal. I asked him what he was doing and he only

answered by snarling like a nasty wild cat, and going ahead nailing up his paper. It was then I got the rifle and ordered him off the place."

The boys explained as rapidly as possible such parts of their adventures as they thought would not alarm Mrs. Chillingworth too much, although it appeared to them that she was a very self-reliant woman—the kind that a rancher in that wild country must have found invaluable. The narration was made in the house, into which Mrs. Chillingworth had invited them. She set out glasses of buttermilk, cool from the cellar, and also produced a dish of fresh fruit, all of which was very inviting to the dusty travelers. In the meantime, Sam had stabled his burro in the corral, and the long-eared little animal was already pitching into the hay stack to the great disgust of the ranch horses.

As soon as she heard the boys' story, Mrs. Chillingworth set about getting the various medicines for which her husband's note called. This done, the boys and Sam sat down to a bountiful meal. It was shortly before two that, mounted

on two good horses, they set out once more for the cove. Sam Hartley and his burro went off in another direction. The nemesis of the Chinese smugglers said he had a clew he wished to look up in the canyon.

There was little danger of Bully Banjo or his gang harassing the ranch before the boys returned with the two men, so that Mrs. Chillingworth felt no nervousness over being left alone. The boys had at first found it hard to account for the behavior of Fu, but Sam, after he had heard the details of the fellow's fright at witnessing the burials and the awe in which he stood of the tall Chinaman, decided that by working on his superstitious fears the gang had pressed him into their service. Undoubtedly he had been selected to bear the warning paper, both because he knew the trail and also to test him.

"But suppose he had weakened at the last minute and told Mrs. Chillingworth everything?" Tom had asked.

"In that case, Fu's career might have reached a sudden termination," said Sam Hartley grimly.

"I don't doubt that Fu was accompanied by other members of that outfit to see that he did not play them false."

"But we only saw one man," objected Jack.

"That was because the rest were hiding in that wood yonder," exclaimed Sam. "From what I know of Bully Banjo he is not the man to allow one of his untried men to go alone on an errand. Too much depends on it."

With the explicit directions they had received, the boys arrived at the cove without missing the trail once, or encountering any adventures. They found the sloop anchored there still. As they rode down the hill, they were delighted to see another figure at Mr. Chillingworth's side as the ranch owner stood upright in the cockpit of the little vessel. It was Mr. Dacre, apparently as well almost as ever, for as he went forward to hoist the anchor while the rancher took the sculling oar, the boys could only detect a slight limp.

It had been only a sprain after all, as they learned presently. But, naturally, the first thing to be done after the sloop had been sculled along-

side the rock was to explain the cause of their delay, and the subsequent happenings.

"Good heavens!" grated out Mr. Chillingworth, as they related the incident of the warning paper and Mrs. Chillingworth's brave behavior. "If the ranchers round here all had the courage of that woman, Bully Banjo's days would soon be numbered."

He was delighted, though, to hear that Sam Hartley was on the scene. During the boys' absence Mr. Dacre had related to him in detail the boys' adventures in the Saw Mill Valley and the part which Sam Hartley had played in them. The rancher therefore felt that the Secret Service man was one to be relied on.

In view of Mr. Dacre's condition, it was decided to let him ride home on one of the horses, accompanied by Jack, while Mr. Chillingworth and Tom remained behind to navigate the sloop around the point and bring her to her anchorage in a small bay not far from the ranch house. The sea had by this time moderated, so that they anticipated no difficulty in doing this.

As progress would be slow up the trail and Mr. Dacre's limb was still too painful to permit him to ride fast, no time was wasted after this, and ten minutes after they had received final instructions, Mr. Dacre and his younger nephew rode off. This time, however, the riders carried weapons. Mr. Chillingworth would have liked to go with them, but he was compelled to take the sloop around to her home anchorage, not liking to leave her alone in the cove. If the schooner, for instance, had dropped in there, her crew were quite capable of scuttling the little craft, just to show that they were men to be reckoned with.

Shortly after they had waved farewells to the horsemen, who speedily vanished into the curtain of pine woods and brush, the sloop set sail. Out past the point she beat, with a fair wind swelling her sails. Tom, who was quite handy about a boat, acted as "sheet tender," while Mr. Chillingworth minded the helm. Before long they were outside the cove and plunging along through the big swells that the brisk wind had heaped up in the open water outside.

It was exhilarating sailing. The handy little craft fairly flew along, every now and then bucking a big sea and drenching herself with glittering spray.

But all this, pleasant as it was, held her back a good deal, so that when darkness fell it still found them some little distance from the anchorage they had hoped to reach by sundown.

"Never mind," said Mr. Chillingworth. "I know this coast like a book. Tom, keep a good look out forward, my boy, and when you see a big, lone pine standing up against the sky on top of that range of hills yonder, let me know. That pine is a landmark for my harbor."

But supper—a sandwich and a cup of coffee—grabbed in the intervals of working the boat, was eaten, and still no sign of the lone pine could be made out.

"I'll beat out a bit and come in again on another tack," decided Mr. Chillingworth finally. "We're getting too close in shore for my liking. There are a great many rocks and shoals running out from land hereabouts."

Accordingly, the sloop was put about and headed out into the open Sound. The wind had by this time freshened considerably. So much so, in fact, that before long it became necessary to take in the jib they were carrying and set a smaller one—a storm-sail. As this was an operation requiring some knowledge of boat handling, the helm was given to Tom, while Mr. Chillingworth himself went forward, dragging a big bundle of sailcloth.

As he left the cockpit, Tom noticed—or thought he noticed—some dark object coming up astern of them. Before long all doubt was removed. It was a dark spire of canvas, the sails of a vessel of some kind that he had espied. She seemed to be coming up at a tremendous rate, too, Even in the darkness he noted the white water as it frothed under her forefoot. To his surprise, the boy noticed, too, that she carried no lights. This, however, did not bother him as the sloop's lights had been placed into the forestays some time before, and shone out brightly.

However, he called Mr. Chillingworth's atten-

tion to the approaching vessel. The rancher eyed her keenly, pausing in his work on the wet, pitching foredeck to do so.

"Queer she carries no lights," he commented. "however, our port light is toward them. They must have seen the red gleam by this time. It's their place to go about and get out of our way."

"But suppose they don't?"

"Oh, they will. They wouldn't deliberately run us down. Now watch your helm close, for I'm going to lower the jib, and without any headsail she'll be hard to handle."

Tom did his best to do as he was told, but just as the jib came down a sudden puff of wind came roaring across the water. With it came a huge wave that curved its crest menacingly above the tiny sloop. Tom, in his excitement, gave the tiller a quick shove over to meet the wave quartering. But as he altered his helm, there came a terrific crash above his head. The sloop's boom swung over and she "jibed" sharply. Had the maneuver been deliberately made in such a wind and sea it would have been dangerous. As it

was, however, it caught them utterly unprepared. There was a quick shout from Mr. Chillingworth, a cry of alarm from Tom, and the lad found himself suddenly struggling in the water.

The sloop had capsized in an instant, and now lay, bottom up, on the heaving sea. Mustering all his strength, Tom struck out for her and succeeded in reaching the hull. It was a hard task to clamber up the slippery, wet sides, but finally he managed it and succeeded in perching himself on the keel.

To his great delight, Mr. Chillingworth presently joined him there. He had had a narrow escape of being caught in the tangle of rigging, but had kicked himself free and was unhurt. He had no word of blame for Tom, although the lad took himself to task bitterly for being the cause of the accident.

During these tense moments, when it was a toss-up between life and death, they had both forgotten the near proximity of the sailing craft they had noticed a few minutes previously. Mr. Chillingworth, however, placed his hands to his

"Ahoy! Ship ahoy!" he yelled.

mouth and hailed the craft, which was not more than a few score of feet away from the capsized sloop.

"Ahoy! Ship ahoy!" he yelled.

Tom joined him in his cries for help. At first it seemed that the crew of the sailing vessel had not noticed them, for the big craft was keeping right on. But just when it looked as if she was going to slip by, leaving them there on their perilous perches, there was a sudden stir noticeable on her decks. A light flashed near her stern, and sharp voices were heard calling commands.

Presently she was hove to, her sails shivering and slapping, and her blocks rattling with an infernal din. A voice hailed them, seemingly through a megaphone:

"Ahoy thar, what's the trouble?"

"We're capsized. Throw us a line!" shouted Mr. Chillingworth.

To his astonishment, instead of his appeal being complied with, an argument seemed to ensue on the deck of the vessel. Some man appeared, so far as they could judge, to be urging

their rescue, while others contended against it. "Let 'em rot there," they heard, as one of the voices rose louder than the others, and the wind bore it down to them. "We ain't in any business where we wants strangers aboard."

But the objectors, it seemed, had the worst of the argument, for the next minute the sailing vessel began to drift down on them.

"Get ready to catch a line," came a shout, and presently a rope came hissing through the air. Mr. Chillingworth hauled on it, drawing the sloop in under the lee of the high side of the sailing vessel. The castaways could now see that she was a schooner and a good-sized one, too.

"Hurry up, and git aboard thar," bellowed a rough voice, from above, as they made fast. "We don't want ter lose any more uv this slant uv wind than we has to, by Chowder!"

Something in the voice rang in a strangely familiar way in Tom's ears. Why this was so, he was to know in a few minutes.

A Jacob's ladder was cast to them and they clambered up it over the schooner's rail, and pres-

ently were standing on the stern in the lee of a low deck-house. As they reached the deck, a figure stepped forward from the group which had aided in their rescue, and thrust a lantern into their faces.

As the light fell on them, this figure stepped back with a quick exclamation of astonishment.

"Chillingworth, by Chowder, and"—once more the lantern was swung forward—"one of them young varmints thet got away this morning. Wall, by Juniper, ef this ain't Yankee luck."

Tom knew the voice well enough now. It was Simon Lake who spoke. And it was his notorious schooner upon whose deck they stood. Small wonder is it that the boy's heart beat chokingly, and his pulses throbbed as he realized their situation.

CHAPTER XIV.

AT THE CHILLINGWORTH RANCH.

Mr. Dacre and Jack reached the ranch without accident or adventure. They found Mrs. Chillingworth awaiting them with a well-spread supper table ready, and the cheerful glow of lamps about the house. She was disappointed that her husband had had to go around with the sloop, but realizing that it was an unavoidable task she made no comment upon it. If they had fair wind and made a good "landfall," the rancher's wife said that the missing members of the party ought to arrive about midnight. That was, unless they elected to sleep on board the sloop.

Soon after Mr. Dacre and his nephew had stabled their horses and done up a few of the rougher chores for Mrs. Chillingworth, Sam Hartley and his burro were heard returning—that is, the burro was, for he gave a loud "he-haw" of anticipation as he caught a whiff of the

hay. As Mr. Dacre and Jack hastened with lanterns to meet the returned Secret Service man, they noticed that the burro bore a burden of some kind across its back. As the lantern light fell on this load, they were astonished to see that it was the limp body of a man.

"I'll explain all about this later," said Sam, anticipating their questions. "The first thing is to get this poor fellow into the house. Jack, you take charge of the burro. This isn't work for boys. Now, Mr. Dacre, if you'll lay hold of his arms, I'll take his legs and go easy for there isn't much life left in the poor chap."

It was characteristic of Sam that he had betrayed no astonishment on seeing Mr. Dacre. He already knew that he would, in all probability, be there that evening, and when Sam Hartley saw that a thing had fallen out as might have been expected, he made no comments. It was the unusual only that aroused him.

While Jack, consumed with curiosity, stabled the burro, Mr. Dacre and Sam Hartley bore their limp burden into the house. Mrs. Chilling-

worth at once made ready a spare room for him, while Mr. Dacre and Sam laid him on the lounge and set about doing what they could to revive him.

The first thing Mr. Dacre noticed was that there were red bands round the man's wrists where the flesh had been cut deeply into. For the rest, his limited medical experience showed him that the man was suffering from exhaustion and possibly fright. What had caused the abrasions on his wrists, however, Mr. Dacre could not imagine.

The man was dressed roughly, in a faded shirt, very dirty and stained corduroy trousers, and cow-hide boots. He had no hat and his lank hair hung dankly about his bloated, red face. His nose was huge and bulbous, and his whole appearance was that of a man of dissipated habits.

Presently—while they were still trying to revive the fellow—Jack came in from the barn. As soon as his eyes fell upon the man on the lounge, he gave a cry of surprise.

"Why that's one of the fellows who was set to guard us!" he exclaimed.

Sam Hartley looked up quickly.

"It is, eh? One of the chaps who went to sleep and gave you a chance to use that knife?"

"Yes. What is he doing here? Where did you find him? What is the matter with him?"

Jack fairly poured out the questions. Sam Hartley smiled at his impatience.

"One at a time, lad," he said, with a deliberation that was positively irritating to Jack, who was wild with curiosity. "Now here's Mrs. Chillingworth, and I guess she's come to tell us that the bed is ready. We'll get this fellow into it, and then when we've all had some supper I'll tell you just how I came to find him. I reckon he's one of Bully Banjo's horrible examples."

"Horrible examples?" echoed Jack. "How do you mean?"

"I mean," said Sam Hartley slowly, as he helped Mr. Dacre lift the still senseless man, "that he's been paying pretty dearly for his sleep."

Led by Mrs. Chillingworth, holding the lamp high above her head, they bore him to a small room upstairs. But it was some time before they could do more than watch him anxiously and await the time for him to speak.

In the meantime, after supper, as he had promised, Sam Hartley told how he came to run across the unfortunate fellow.

"As you know," he began, after he had lighted his pipe, and they all sat about in interested attitudes in the big, comfortable living room; "as you know, when I left here this afternoon, it was for a definite purpose—to discover if possible how Bully Banjo and his men managed to get inland from the sea without crossing any trails. Well, I found out that at the same time as I found this fellow.

"It was this way: I had an idea in my mind as to how those rascals were getting into the canyon. Well, I found out that soon enough. As I expected, they were using a tunnel made by the river under the range, between the canyon and the sea. It was the simplest thing in the world

for them to land their Mongolians right on the beach and then march 'em through that hole. In some places I guess they must have had to wade up to their knees, though."

"Oh, then you didn't go through it?" inquired Jack.

"No indeed," was the rejoinder. "I wasn't going to take a chance like that. I just got close enough to see the big opening—mostly screened by brush it was—the tracks in the sand along the side of the river told me the rest. But all that isn't telling you about that poor fellow upstairs."

Sam Hartley paused here, looked very grave, and shoved the tobacco down in his pipe bowl. Then he resumed:

"We've all read of pirates and stringing up by the thumbs, and things like that, but I never thought I'd live to see the victim of such practices. But that—or something very like it—is what had been done to our red-faced friend. As I emerged from the vicinity of the tunnel I heard a groan a little way up the canyon. I followed

the sound up and soon came to where they had strung that chap up in a tree by his wrists. There he was, dangling about in the hot sun, suspended by his two wrists and nothing else. His feet were a foot or more off the ground."

His hearers uttered horrified exclamations. Then Jack asked:

"But how did they come to tie him there, and why?"

"Well, the 'why' part of that is soon answered," said the Secret Service man. "It was as a punishment for letting you escape. As to why they chose just that place, I imagine it was because they had trailed you boys down the river bank. When they reached the tunnel and found no trace of you, they knew you must have got clear away, and so they proceeded to string up that chap as a horrible example."

"But what about the Indian? He was equally guilty. Why didn't they punish him, too?"

"Well, that I cannot answer. I guess, though, the Indian probably cleared out during the excitement following your escape. His race are

pretty wise, as a rule, and he surmised there would be trouble in store for him if he stayed. I'm mighty glad I found that fellow, though, for other reasons than those of humanity."

"What—for instance?" asked Mr. Dacre.

"Well, I think we may be able to get a lot of useful information out of him about the gang. Information that will help me to get them just where I want them. For, you see, when I do get ready to start in on them, I don't want to run any chances of a slip up. I want to be able to bring my hand down on the whole shooting match and stamp them out for all time."

When they retired that night the red-nosed man had so far recovered as to be able to give an account of himself. As Sam had guessed, it was Bully Banjo who had triced the unfortunate fellow up as a "lesson" for his carelessness. The man also confirmed Sam's guess that the Indian had saved himself by running away. But he had not escaped scot-free, for before the Chinook managed to make his escape Simon Lake had ordered him tied up and several lashes adminis-

tered. These had been laid on by Zeb Hunt, with a promise of more to come, but when the gang returned from the fruitless search after the boys it was found that the Indian had, in some manner best known to himself, slipped his bonds and made his way to freedom.

From the red-nosed man it was also learned that Bully Banjo intended to run the Chinamen through that day, and set sail the same night for the island where, as the rancher had suspected right along, deliveries of Chinamen were made. In answer to Jack's questions it was explained that the Chinese were brought across the Pacific as far as Vancouver Island in an ostensible freight steamer. From this they were transferred at a lonely spot to another vessel, which brought them to the island. Here they were kept till opportunities presented themselves to get them through into the States.

No real apprehension was felt at the ranch concerning the rancher and Tom Dacre till about noon the next day, when they failed to put in an

appearance. Even allowing for headwinds and other possible delays, this began to look serious.

It was about mid-afternoon that a man on horseback reached the ranch. He was a neighboring landholder, whose ranch bordered in some places on the coast of the Sound. His face was grave as he slipped from his horse in front of the ranch house, and he saw Sam Hartley and Mr. Dacre coming toward him with a good deal of relief.

"I'm glad I didn't have to face the woman with the news I've got," he said. "That there sloop of Chillingworth's drifted ashore bottom up in my cove this morning."

From behind the little group there came a piercing scream, and Sam Hartley turned just in time to catch Mrs. Chillingworth as she swooned.

"And there was no trace of her occupants?" asked Mr. Dacre, in a voice he strove to make steady in spite of the trembling of his lips.

The other shook his head.

"We had a tough blow last night," he said,

"and I guess that sloop went over before they could do a thing. My advice is to watch the beaches. Their bodies are likely to drift ashore sooner or later."

CHAPTER XV.

"STEAMER, AHOY!"

"Well, Tom, all I can say is—we must keep on hoping for the best."

It was Mr. Chillingworth who spoke, the morning after the casting away of the sloop.

He and Tom Dacre were standing against the lee rail of the schooner amidships, watching with gloomy faces the white spume as it sped by. Above them the canvas was bellied out, heeling the schooner smartly and putting her on her sailing lines. On the other hand, could be dimly seen the blue shores of the Strait of San Juan de Fuca. Bully Banjo's schooner was making for the open Pacific, but what was her destination they had not the slightest idea.

The events of the night before seemed like a nightmare viewed in the crisp, sparkling, early daylight, with the white deck of a fast schooner under their feet. Somewhat to their surprise,

Simon Lake had offered them no violence, and had even accommodated them with a berth in the cabin, turning out one of his own men for the purpose. If Mr. Chillingworth was as good a judge of human emotions as he deemed himself to be, it appeared to him that the Chinese runner was glad rather than otherwise at the way things had fallen out, and, so far at least, not disposed to offer them any active harm. At breakfast, which was just over, Simon Lake, who, with Zeb Hunt, had shared the meal with the castaways, had seemed particularly inclined to be amiable. One thing, though, was noticeable: he did not refer in any way to the occurrences of the night before, nor to the events which had preceded them. For all that appeared to the contrary, any listener to the conversation might have imagined that Tom Dacre and the rancher were honored guests of the sea ranger.

But, of course, all this show of friendliness had not for an instant deceived either of the castaways. Tom's experience in Simon Lake's camp had taught him just what the man was, and what

he would dare to do. As for Mr. Chillingworth, he had long ago made up his mind that their present host was the most dangerous man on the Pacific Slope. Doubtless he was even now discussing a course of action with Zeb Hunt, down in the cabin, where both had been closeted since breakfast. Taking advantage of this, Tom and Mr. Chillingworth had slipped on deck to try to get an opportunity to talk the situation over.

But, not so very greatly to their surprise, this proved to be a hard thing to do. As soon as they stopped at any one spot and began to talk, some member of the crew—many of whom Tom recognized as having occupied the camp in the canyon—happened along on some errand or other, apparently accidental. Of course, there was little doubt that they had been told to overhear all they could and report it to their leader.

"Have you any idea where we are bound?" inquired Tom, not caring much whether a man who had just come up ostensibly to coil a rope heard him or not.

"Not the slightest," rejoined Mr. Chilling-

worth, "unless it can be to that island of Simon Lake's—or rather of the syndicate engaged in this rascally business."

Tom's face fell.

"Once they get us there," he said disconsolately, "we won't stand much chance of getting away again till they wish it."

"That is so," agreed Mr. Chillingworth, in an equally gloomy tone; "yet what are we to do?"

He sank his voice.

"I have thought over a dozen plans of escape, but none of them will bear analysis. It looks as if we are absolutely in this rascal's power."

"Why not hail a passing vessel—provided one comes near enough?" suggested Tom. "Surely our signals would attract attention."

"If we could make them—yes," rejoined Mr. Chillingworth, "but you don't suppose, do you, that they would give us such an opportunity? Why the minute one of us sprang on that rail to wave for help we would be knocked down and perhaps badly injured."

"Just the same I'm going to make a try for it,"

thought Tom to himself, "if any opportunity offers."

Simon Lake himself, and his scrubby-haired first mate, had now emerged from the cabin companionway, and were pacing the inclined stern deck. Every now and again, Lake crossed to the side of the man at the wheel and peered into the compass. From time to time he cast an eye aloft at the canvas. The schooner was carrying every bit of plainsail, despite the smart wind that was humming through her rigging. Evidently, Lake did not believe in allowing his ship to loaf along. He carried an amount of canvas which would have given an old-fashioned skipper heart disease. The schooner showed the strain, too. Every now and again, she would give a heel that sent her lee rail under and the yeasty foam boiling and swirling along the scuppers.

At last, shortly before noon, the opportunity for which Tom had been waiting presented itself. Dead ahead, across the tumbling blue water, could be seen the heeling, rolling form of a steamer. She was coming toward them and if

she held her present course, would be bound to pass them a short distance to lee. When she did so, Tom made up his mind that he was going to try to attract her attention.

On came the vessel, black smoke pouring from her funnel and her masts cutting crazy arcs against the sky. Now and then the sun flashed on her wet plates as she rolled. She was a black craft with towering white upper decks, which showed her to be a passenger craft. On board her was safety, law, and order. Tom's heart fairly ached to attract her attention. The case was no different with the rancher, but what with anxiety over the worry his wife would be feeling, and general trouble over their position, Mr. Chillingworth had had little to say for the last hour or two. He had sat silently at the foot of the foremast, his head in his hands and lost in the dismal trend of his thoughts.

The steamer was now almost abeam of them. So close was she that Tom could catch the glint of brass buttons on her bridge and the gay colors of the ladies' dresses as they walked along the

promenade decks, and no doubt remarked to their escorts on the beauty of the little schooner heading out to the open sea.

As the two ships drew abeam, Tom leaped into the lee rigging, hanging on by one of the fore shrouds. His cap—an old sea affair, given him by Bully Banjo—was in his hand, and he was raising his arm to wave it.

"Ahoy! Steamer, ahoy!" he yelled.

The wind bore his cries down toward the other vessel and a commotion could be seen on her bridge. Presently there came a gush of white steam from her whistle and her way decreased noticeably. But Tom had hardly had time to take in these details before a heavy hand fell on his shoulder and the next instant Zeb Hunt's rough fist had felled him to the deck.

"You young shark!" snarled the mate, "this is the worst day's work you've ever done. You keep off there, Chillingworth," he went on truculently, as the rancher came forward protesting. "This is our affair."

The rancher glanced helplessly about him.

The entire crew had gathered about the prostrate boy. It would have been worse than madness to have resisted any of Hunt's mandates just then. Suddenly a voice hailed from the stern.

"Good work thar, Mister Hunt. Jes' keep that young catamount down thar while I untangle this yar mess."

It was Simon Lake. As he spoke, he took a megaphone from its rack just inside the companionway.

"Schooner, ahoy! What's the trouble on board you?" came a hail from the steamer.

"Ain't nawthin' wrong here as I'm awares on," hailed back Simon, his downeast drawl more pronounced than ever.

"Nothing wrong, you deep sea vagabond, then what in the name of Neptune do you mean by stopping us this way? Don't you know we carry the mails?"

"Sorry," shouted Simon apologetically, "but, yer see, we've got a kind uv a poor looney bye aboard. He thought, poor critter, it 'ud be er joke ter hail yer."

"Oh, he did, did he?" shouted back the commander of the steamer. "Well, you'd better keep your looney under lock and key when mail boats are passing. Come ahead there."

Deep down in the engine room of the steamer the bells jangled and she raced off once more, bound Seattleward. But as it so happened the vessel, which was the "Islander" of the Seattle-Hawaii Line, had a record for punctuality, and her slight delay following Tom's hail was used by the captain as an excuse for some hours he had lost at sea in bad weather. It, therefore, received more space in the Seattle papers than it would have done otherwise. In fact, quite an item appeared about the "crazy boy" on board the outward-bound schooner, who had delayed the "Islander" by his antics. In course of events the paper with this news in it reached Sam Hartley.

This was two days after the "Islander" had docked. But, nothing daunted, Sam set out for Seattle that same night with the bottle-nosed man as a companion.

He was anxious to find the captain of the "Islander," and get from him a description of that schooner. If she was the Chinese runner's vessel, the bottle-nosed man would recognize her from the steamer skipper's description. At least, Sam hoped so.

At any rate, it looked like the only likely clew to the fate of Mr. Chillingworth and Tom, and was, therefore, worth looking into, for after an examination of the sloop Sam had soon come to the conclusion that there were unusual circumstances connected with her abandonment.

For one thing, he had found that the rope attached to her bow had been cut—and with a keen knife, too. This was the rope, it will be recalled, that was thrown to the capsized mariners from the deck of the schooner, and had been cut when the sloop was set adrift.

But in the meantime Mr. Chillingworth and Tom were encountering a series of adventures stranger than any that had yet befallen the Bungalow Boy, and we must leave Sam and follow their fortunes in the hands of Bully Banjo and his men.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN ATTEMPT AT FOUL PLAY.

As might have been expected, Tom's outburst was followed by confinement to the cabin. But this he did not mind so much, as Mr. Chillingworth was his companion, and they found more opportunities to talk over their position thus than was the case on deck, where they were constantly under observation.

The cabin of the schooner was plainly furnished. In the center was a swinging table, oilcloth covered, with four plain swivel chairs at each side, and one at each end. On the floor was some gaudy matting. Above the board hung a big brass lamp. It depended from the crossbars under a skylight opening on deck. At the farther end of the cabin was a flight of ladder-like stairs, leading to the deck. On each side were doors, opening on small staterooms. The wood was pine—of no very good quality—and varnished.

At the forward end was a bulkhead of the same material, along which ran a lounge covered with leather, or an imitation of it.

They had been almost two days at sea now, and still no intimation had come from Simon Lake as to what his intentions were in regard to them. But even Tom's attempt to signal the schooner was not punished with any violence, except Zeb Hunt's knock-down blow.

"Reckin you'll be safer in the cabin arter this, by Juniper," Simon Lake had said, helping the recumbent boy to his feet, and that had been all, except that Tom had deemed it prudent to carry out the hint conveyed in Lake's words to the letter.

It would be wearisome and useless to detail the conversations between Mr. Chillingworth and his young companion. They were all on one subject, and that was: how were they to escape from their predicament. But they all ended in the same place. That is to say—nowhere. Night and day the schooner swarmed with men, so to try to cut away one of the boats, as Tom had sug-

gested, was soon declared to be manifestly impossible.

At meals Simon Lake and Zeb Hunt shared the table with them, but at other times they had the cabin to themselves, except for the occasional ghost-like goings and comings of the tall Chinaman. In this connection it may be interesting to note that since coming on board Tom had seen the recreant Fu. The former employee of Mr. Chillingworth was working on a sail with the crew when his eyes met Tom's. But whatever he may have felt, no expression appeared on the yellow mask that did duty for his face. Tom surmised that, in exchange for a promise of loyalty to the gang, he had been made one of them. But of the status of the tall Chinaman, who seemed to be a man of some influence with both crew and officers, it was more difficult to guess. Mr. Chillingworth was inclined to think he was some sort of a priest. He based this theory on the veneration which Fu had shown on the night he had seen his big countryman at the burial of the dead in the cove. For the rest, the tall Mongolian ate

by himself and had his own cabin. Not by word or sign, since they had been on board, had he conveyed a hint that he had ever seen Tom before, although he must have recognized the boy he had conducted to Simon Lake at the camp in the canyon.

Hitherto the schooner had had fair weather, although the wind had been strong. But this afternoon the sky began to grow overcast and there was an ominous feeling in the air that betokened the coming of a storm. By supper time, in fact, the schooner was laboring along in a heavy sea and under much reduced canvas. But even the reefing which had been done was against Lake's will. In her cabin they could hear his voice coming down through the skylight in angry argument with Zeb Hunt.

"By Chowder, it's my way to clap on all she'll carry."

"But you'll have the sticks out of her by sundown," Zeb had protested.

"All right, then, shorten up if you want to. But not more than one reef in the main sail, mind

yer. I'm a downeast sailorman, and we don't b'lieve in sailing ships ter suit young ladies' seminaries."

By sundown the wind had developed into a screeching gale. Every timber and bolt in the schooner cried out and complained with a different voice. Under the heavy sail that Simon Lake obstinately insisted on carrying, she was being heavily racked.

From the way in which things in the cabin were tumbled about, the gale must have been terrific, but when Mr. Chillingworth tried to go on deck to see what sort of a night it was, he was met by a stern order from Simon Lake.

"Go back thar in ther cabin, Chillingworth," he ordered. "The deck ain't no place fer you ternight."

Soon after, he came down and entered his cabin. He emerged in oilskins. Zeb Hunt followed his example. What, with the trampling of feet as the crew ran about the decks, the increasing motion of the ship, and the cruel uproar the creaking timbers kept up, there was no sleep for

the castaways, and till long after the usual hour for going to their cabin they sat up. A certain amount of apprehension mingled with their other feelings. It is one thing to be upon deck, active and alert, in a big storm, and quite another pair of shoes to be confined in a stuffy cabin, not knowing what is happening above and whether at any moment you may not see green water come tumbling down the companionway.

Shortly before midnight the rancher and Tom Dacre turned in. But it was not to sleep. The storm was decidedly increasing in fury every minute. The little vessel seemed fairly to stand on its head one instant and the next to be rearing upward, pointing toward the stars.

What time it was Tom had no idea, but he figured afterward that it must have been about two hours after they turned in when he was awakened from a troubled doze by loud voices in the cabin outside, and a trampling of feet, as if several persons were there. Opening the door a crack, he peered out.

He saw Simon Lake, very pale, and bleeding from a big cut in his head, laid out on the forward lounge, while Zeb Hunt and several of the others bent over him.

"It all comes of crackin' on so," Hunt was saying. "If we hadn't carried all that canvas, we wouldn't never have had that sail rip loose, and then Bully here wouldn't have got hit with that block."

"Is it a bad cut, Zeb?" asked one of them.

"Well, it's purty deep," said Zeb, who by this time had opened a locker and was selecting some bandages from it. "But I reckon we kin fix it. How d'yer feel now, Bully?"

The injured man gave a groan. It was evident that he was partially stunned by what Tom guessed, from what he had overheard, was a falling block. Soon after he was carried into his cabin, the tall Chinaman being left to watch him.

After that the hours wore on somehow. From time to time Tom fell into an uneasy nap to awaken with a start of alarm and a horrible

fear that the schooner was at last going to the bottom.

There was a clock in the cabin, affixed to the forward bulkhead, and after one of these sudden awakenings he decided to peep out and see what time it was. He longed for the coming of day with every nerve within him. If the schooner was to sink, he felt that it would be better in the daylight than in the pitchy darkness.

Steadying himself by the side of the bunk in which Mr. Chillingworth lay sleeping as peacefully as if he were at home, Tom peered out. He caught his breath with a start as he did so, and saw the figure of the tall Chinaman standing upright above the table in the center of the cabin.

In front of him was a glass of water. He had evidently just fetched it from the small keg at the afterend of the cabin for the injured man.

Tom could hear Simon Lake's voice from another stateroom:

"Cheng! Cheng! Hurry with thet thar water, you blamed yellow-faced Chink."

"Yellow-faced Chink, am I?" Tom heard the

Chinaman mutter, as he reached into his loose blouse and pulled out a small vial containing a red fluid. "Well, Bully Banjo, I am about to demonstrate to you that we yellow-faced Chinks are more than a match for men of your caliber."

As the Chinaman muttered the words, he allowed a few drops of the red liquid to fall into the glass of water.

"One swallow of this and you enter the white devil's heaven," he snarled, tiptoeing toward the cabin in which lay the injured leader of the Chinese runners.

"It's poison," gasped Tom to himself, "and he's going to give it to Simon Lake."

Already the tall Chinaman's hand was on the handle of the stateroom door, and he was about to enter it when Tom's door opened, and above the uproar of the storm he shouted:

"Hold on a minute there."

The Chinaman faced around like a flash. There was an evil expression on his face, but it changed to a smile as he saw the boy. For a forced smile

summoned so hastily to the surface it was a very creditable one.

"Ah, it is the white boy," he exclaimed. "What do you want, white boy?"

"I'd like a drink of water," said Tom. "Let's have that glass a minute, will you?"

The Chinaman looked hard at him for an instant as if he would have penetrated his thoughts. Then, satisfied apparently that Tom had seen nothing, he said:

"Bym bye you can have. Jes' now me go give dlink to Missa Lake."

Still grinning like a yellow image, he glided into the cabin occupied by the injured man.

"Here, give it to me, quick. Consarn it, the thirst is burning me up," Simon Lake cried, as he reached for the glass.

But before his fingers could close on it, it was dashed from his grasp and its contents spilled over the floor.

"Consarn your mischiev-ous hide, what d'ye mean by that?" bellowed Lake, furiously turning on Tom, who had entered the cabin in two flying

leaps, just in time to save the rascal from drinking the stuff.

"I don't owe you any debt of gratitude," rejoined Tom, "but I don't want to see you poisoned by a scoundrelly Chinaman. That fellow drugged that water."

"Wh-a-a-a-a-t!"

"That's right. If you don't believe it, have him searched. You'll find a small vial of red stuff in his blouse. He dropped some of it into your water, and——"

Stunned by the suddenness with which his rascally plot had been discovered, the Chinaman had hitherto remained motionless. Now, with a bellow of rage, he leaped at Tom, flinging his long, wiry arms about him.

The boy struggled bravely, but the yellow man had the first hold and he was tremendously strong, as Tom soon found out while he helplessly thrashed and struggled.

But either Simon Lake was not as badly injured as they thought, or else he managed to make a superhuman effort, for just as the Mon-

golian had Tom down on the cabin floor and his yellow fingers were digging in his throat, Lake hurled himself out of his bunk upon the yellow man, bearing him with resistless force to the floor under his great weight.

This was the tableau that Zeb Hunt, rushing into the cabin, arrived just in time to see. He came to the aid of his superior and they soon had the tall Chinaman helpless.

"Sarch his blouse, Zeb! Sarch his blouse!" bellowed Simon Lake, his wound apparently forgotten in his excitement.

"I'll tie him first," said the prudent Zeb, producing some yarn. Then, with the Mongolian helplessly pinioned to a stanchion, the mate proceeded to search him. Almost the first object he found was the vial which Tom had seen.

"Here it is, boss," he said. "Just as the youngster said."

The Chinaman bent an angry glare on them.

"Him no poison. Him medicine," he cried.

"Oh, it is, is it. Well, I'll mix you up a dose of it and see if you'll take it," declared Zeb.

Procuring a glass, he mixed up some of the red drops with water. But when they were thrust toward him, the Chinaman had to admit by his refusal to take it that the stuff was deadly poison.

Simon Lake, white and shaky, now that the excitement was over, had sunk back on the lounge. He kept passing his hand over his bandaged brow as he looked on as if to try to assure himself that he was awake.

"Just ter think that thet thar rascal Cheng who I've trusted like a babby would hev tried to give me a deal like thet," he kept repeating. "What d'yer think got inter the feller, Zeb? Why did he want ter do it?"

"In ther fust place, because he's jes' naturally mean and pesky, bein' a Chink," rejoined Zeb, "and in ther next, I reckon he figured that with you out of the way and the rest of us busy on deck, he'd rob you uv that money belt of yours and nobody be the wiser."

"Maybe you're right," rejoined the injured man grimly, "but I'm too sick ter attend ter him

now. But, by Juniper, wait till I'm well. I'll ——"

There came a sudden jarring crash. The schooner trembled as though she had been dealt a mortal blow. At the same time there was a terrible grinding of timbers, and a confused uproar of alarmed shouts and cries from above.

"Jee-hos-o-phat, we've struck!" shouted Zeb, bolting from the cabin. He darted up the stairs in an instant. Simon Lake, staggering as he went, followed him. An instant later Mr. Chillingworth, aroused by the clamor and the shock, appeared.

"Come on," cried Tom, "something's happened. I don't know what, but maybe our opportunity to escape has arrived."

CHAPTER XVII.

A STRANGE ENCOUNTER.

On deck they found a scene of the wildest confusion. The wind had abated somewhat, but there was still a big sea running. To the east the sky was gray and wan with the first streaks of dawn, and the waste of tumbling waters was lighted dimly by the newborn light. Forward was a crowd of men, in the midst of them being Zeb Hunt. The wounded Bully Banjo had managed to claw his way forward along the swaying decks also, and stood by his mate's side, holding on to a back stay.

Mr. Chillingworth and Tom Dacre hastened forward to see what had happened. They found the group of seamen clustered about some figures that they had just hauled over the side with life belts.

"Their boat went down like a rock when we struck her," one of the crew, who had been on

deck when the collision occurred, was explaining to another, as the boy hastened past.

But the next instant he stopped short with a gasp of astonishment. In the center of the group of sailors and rescued persons from the small craft the schooner had seemingly just run down, was one that was strangely familiar. As Tom drew nearer he heard a youthful voice pipe up. Its owner's small form was hidden by the clustering seamen of the schooner:

"What kind of a boat is this, pa-pa?"

"This is a schooner, my child. It has just run us down," rejoined the tall, lanky figure.

"What did they run us down for, pa-pa?"

"Professor Dingle!" cried Tom, recognizing first the questioning voice of the professor's son and heir, and then the tall, bony figure.

"Tom Dacre, my boy!" cried the professor delightedly.

"How came you here?" asked Tom.

"I might ask the same question of you," rejoined the professor. "I was cruising north toward the Aleutian peninsula in my little yawl-

rigged boat, when out of the darkness this schooner came upon me and ran me down. My two faithful Kanakas and my boy and myself only managed to save ourselves by a hair's breadth."

"But how did you come to be hereabouts, professor?" asked Tom.

"Again the same question might apply to you, my lad, but the fact is that I 'm off on a scientific cruise to the Aleutian Islands in search of rare specimens. We sailed from Victoria three days ago and ran into that terrible storm last night."

The crew stood about grinning while the professor was making his explanations. They seemed to think the whole thing a rare joke, now that the shock of the collision was over and it had been ascertained that no damage had been sustained by the schooner. As for the professor himself, he accepted the situation as calmly as if it were an everyday matter. His two Kanakas, brown-skinned, black-haired fellows of slender, yet athletic build—of whom more hereafter—also

accepted the situation, seemingly as an unavoidable stroke of fate.

Tom introduced the professor to Mr. Chillingworth. Surely never were introductions gone through amid stranger surroundings! Hardly had the ceremony been concluded than word came forward by one of the crew that Simon Lake wished them all to report aft in the cabin at once.

This was not a summons to be disregarded, and, headed by Tom and the professor, whose inquisitive offspring clutched tightly to his hand, they started along the plunging, rolling decks. On their way aft Tom explained the exact situation to the professor—or as much of it as he could in the few seconds of time he had. The man of science took it with as unmoved an air as he accepted most happenings in his life.

He was vexed, though, at the interruption of his scientific expedition, which he had undertaken in the interests of the Puget Sound University, whose intention it was to form a museum of Pacific Coast flora and fauna, second to none.

"However," he remarked, with a philosophical shrug, "it is no use railing at fate. The only thing to be done is to make the best of it."

Which, incidentally, was as good a bit of philosophy as the professor could have found in any of his books.

"And now," he concluded briskly, "let us see what sort of a man is in command of this ship."

The first object that met their eyes as they made their way down the steep companion stairs was not one calculated to inspire a timid man with confidence.

The tall Chinaman, his face contorted from the pain of his tight thongs, was still secured to the stanchion. His face worked as he saw the newcomers, and for an instant Tom thought he was going to make an appeal for mercy. But if such had been his intention, he thought better of it and remained silent. It was Simon Lake who broke the silence that reigned as the "passengers," as they may be called, ranged themselves along the cabin bulkhead, awaiting Simon Lake's announcement of the cause of his summons. It was not

long in coming. Lake, who was sprawled out on the lounge with Zeb Hunt at his side, eyed them a minute as if in some doubt how to begin. His hawk-like face was not improved by the bandage which now enwrapped his head.

"What makes that man look so funny, pa-pa?" whispered the professor's offspring inquiringly.

"Hush," cautioned the professor; "he's going to speak."

"Waal, gents," began Simon Lake harshly, "we've got considerable more of a crew on board this craft than we started out with. Ther only question in my mind is wot ter do with yer."

Certainly Simon Lake had a way of coming to the point without beating about the bush, which might be imitated by some of our legal lights and other public luminaries.

As no one answered, and he did not seem to expect them to, he resumed:

"Of course, I might chuck the whole shootin' match of yer overboard. But I ain't goin' ter do it. You, Chillingworth, I don't see as you're entitled ter any mercy. You'd hev made it hard fer

me ef yer could. You'd hev seen me ahind bars ef you'd hed yer way—wouldn't yer now?"

"Well, since you put it so directly, Simon Lake, I certainly would have done my best to secure your being put out of business, so far as your nefarious trade is concerned."

"Ah, but yer didn't," grinned Simon Lake maliciously, "and now I've got yer right whar I want yer—an' I'm goin' ter keep yer, too. Lucky I nailed yer afore you could carry out yer little idee of settin' ther Secret Service onter me—eh?"

"He knows nothing about Sam Hartley, then," thought Tom, with a flash of distinct relief.

As Mr. Chillingworth made no answer except to look the rascal straighter in the eye, Lake resumed.

"Waal, luck, er fate, er providence, er whatever yer like ter call it, hez certainly turned ther tables on yer in a most re-markable way," he went on, in a musing tone. "An' I ain't one ter fly no ways in ther face uv providence. Here you are, and here you'll stay. I've got work fer you an' ther rest, too, whar we air a-goin'."

"And where is that, may I ask?" inquired Mr. Chillingworth.

Lake grinned.

"Why, to er delightful island thet we ought ter be raisin' at any moment now."

But if they hoped to hear any more about their destination just then, they were disappointed, for Lake went on without any further reference to it.

"This gent here is a perfesser, I understan'," he said. "Waal, maybe I'll hev a job fer him, too. Do you understand assaying, perfesser?"

"The science of gauging the value of the metals contained in any ore-bearing rock, do you mean?" asked the scientist.

"Waal, that's a heap o' fancy sail ter carry onter it, but ter come down ter brass tacks, by Chowder, that's jes' the idee I want ter convey. Do you understand it?"

"Why, to some extent—yes. Have you any ore you wish assayed?"

"I'll tell yer abaout thet later," said Lake, with a cunning leer. "Now, then," he resumed, "what

is them two black fellers you've got thar—Kanakas, ain't they? "

The professor nodded.

"I hope you mean them no harm," he said. "They are faithful, hard-working fellows, and excellent sailors. Their names are Monday and Tuesday, so called after the days on which they were hired."

"Das so. Yes, boss, das so, fer a fac'," said one of the South Sea natives, pulling his black silky forelock in true sailor fashion.

"I reckon we kin fin' work fer them, too," decided Lake. "Yer see, it's jes' this way: Whar we're goin' every one hez ter work, er else starve. I reckon you'd rather work then starve, so I'm goin' ter give yer all a chance."

"One question, Lake," put in the rancher. "I've a home and wife back yonder on the Sound. In mercy's name, tell me, and tell me the truth—am I ever going to see them again?"

Lake looked at him curiously, and then the wretch deliberately rose to his feet.

"Reckon the weather's clearin' quite a bit, Zeb,"

he said, without taking the slightest notice of the perturbed rancher. "We'd best be gittin' on deck. By the bye," he said suddenly turning to Tom, "you did me a sarvice with that thar yaller devil. I'll not forget it."

He started for the companionway stairs followed by Zeb. It was his evident intention to pay no heed to Mr. Chillingworth. But the rancher intercepted him.

"As you are human, Lake," he pleaded, "answer my question. Think, man, what it means to me—to my wife——"

He stopped short, evidently afraid to trust his voice further. Lake turned and met his outburst with a cruel smile.

"We're reckonin' on hevin' yer with us fer quite a stay, Chillingworth," he said, setting his foot on the bottom step of the companionway, "so make up yer mind ter thet. We need yer ranch, and——"

Before he could add another word Chillingworth's form was hurtling across the cabin. The rancher, distracted for the moment by his wrongs,

flew at the bully like a wild beast. Lake staggered and almost fell under the unexpected onslaught, but the next instant he recovered himself and drew and leveled a pistol. That moment might have been the rancher's last, but for Zeb Hunt. At the same instant as Lake drew his revolver, the mate of the schooner raised his heavy-booted foot and dealt Mr. Chillingworth a brutal kick in the pit of the stomach. As the pistol exploded the rancher sank down in a heap, groaning in agony. The bullet flew by Tom's ear and buried itself in a panel of the cabin.

"Thet's what any uv ther rest uv yer'll git ef yer try ter cut up monkey shines, by Heck!" snarled Lake, blowing the smoke from the barrel of his revolver with the utmost calmness.

While Tom sprang forward to aid the suffering rancher, Lake and Zeb Hunt proceeded to the deck. Under the lad's ministrations Mr. Chillingworth presently grew somewhat better, and Tom and the professor managed to help him into his cabin, where they laid him out on a bunk.

While they were all in the small stateroom,

even the two Kanakas, who seemed to dislike the idea of being left alone, being with them, there came a sudden click of the lock of the door.

Tom, guessing what had happened, but still not permitting himself to believe it, sprang to the portal. He shook it furiously, but it resisted his efforts to open it.

"Prisoners!" he gasped. "They've locked the door!"

Realizing that it was no use attempting to force the portal open, they decided to await Lake's pleasure in the matter of opening it. In the meantime, they turned once more to the subject of a possible chance for escape.

"One thing is certain," the professor decided, at the end of the discussion of a dozen or more plans, "we are in no immediate danger. It is equally certain that we can do nothing while we are on board the schooner. The only thing to do is to wait till we reach this island. When we know just what is going to happen to us we can formulate plans better, in the meantime we——"

He stopped short. There was a trampling of

feet in the cabin outside. It sounded as if a struggle were in progress. For an instant a voice broke out in wild pleadings—or so it seemed—but the cries were suddenly hushed as if a hand had been placed over the mouth of whoever was uttering them.

Then the trampling ceased and the sound of footsteps ascending the companion stairway could be heard. All this the prisoners in the cabin had heard in silence. As the sounds died away Tom turned to the others.

"It must have been that Chinaman! They ——"

A sudden piercing scream assailed their ears. Their cheeks whitened as they heard it, so wild and ringing and appealing was the cry.

It was succeeded by deadly silence. What could have occurred? They all had a guess in their minds, but none of them dared to voice it. One thing, though, Tom was certain of, and that was that the cry had come from the deck. In that case——

But at this point of his meditations the cabin

door was suddenly flung open and Zeb's unwieldy form stood framed in the doorway.

"You kin come out now," he said.

Was it Tom's imagination, or did the mate's voice seem less blustery than usual, and his cheeks not quite so red? Suddenly Lake's voice came hailing down from the head of the companion stairs:

"On deck here, Zeb. We'll be makin' a landfall soon."

It seemed to Tom that Lake's voice, too, was subdued and quiet. It held almost a quaver. But he had little time for noticing these things, for, as they emerged from the cabin—with Mr. Chillingworth, who was now almost recovered—there came a sudden electrifying hail:

"Land ho!"

"Where away?" came Lake's roar from above.

"Two points off'n the sta'bo'd bow," came back the answer from somewhere forward.

As the castaways, excited by the sensation that the end of their strange voyage was in sight,

sprang up the companion stairs, Tom noted one thing.

The cabin was empty of life. At the foot of the stanchion, to which the Chinaman had been tied, the ropes which had bound him lay in an untidy tangle. But the man himself was gone, nor did they ever see him again.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ISLAND.

But the sight that greeted Tom's eyes as he emerged on deck speedily drove all other thoughts from his mind. The wind had died down, and, although a heavy swell was still running, the sea was by no means rough. Across the gray waves, not more than a mile or so from the schooner, was visible the outlines of a rocky island.

Under the pall of gray sky, and surrounded by the leaden, sullen seas, it looked a dismal spot of land. So far as Tom could make out, it was craggy and mountainous in the extreme. On the side by which they were approaching it, the island was wooded down almost to the water's edge.

Tom found the professor at his elbow. He began to talk to him at once. There was no fear of any one overhearing them. The crew and the leaders of the gang were far too busy scanning the island. In the lee rigging Simon Lake hung

by one arm, while, with his free hand, he held a pair of glasses to his eyes.

"What land do you suppose that is?" asked Tom, as the schooner plunged onward toward it.

The professor thought a moment before answering. It was evident he was making some sort of mental calculation. At last he spoke, and by this time Mr. Chillingworth was one of the group about him.

"I should judge it to be one of the group of islets found to the southward of the Queen Charlotte group," he replied. "They are scattered pretty thickly through these waters, and, as they are seldom visited except by whalers short of water or seal poachers, they would naturally afford an ideal place for men plying the trade that you have informed me Lake is engaged in."

"I agree with you," said Mr. Chillingworth, in a low, hopeless sort of tone. "Once on one of those islands and the chance of our ever being heard of again is so remote as to be among the impossibilities. Great heavens, my poor wife ——"

He broke off with a groan. The professor, after a quick glance about him to make sure they were not overheard, laid a comforting hand on his shoulder.

"Brace up, sir," he said. "I have by no means given up hope yet. At all events, once on land we shall have more of a chance to get away than we would have on board this schooner."

His tone seemed to cheer the despondent rancher considerably. He glanced gratefully at the philosopher and then said:

"You are right, professor. It is foolish to give way like this when we ought to be bending our energies in other directions. I shall complain no more."

"That's right," said the professor heartily. The next instant he turned, as Monday plucked his sleeve.

"What is it, Monday?" he asked.

"Boss, me at dese island once in whaler. Tuesday he here, too. Long time ago," said the Kanaka, an excited light burning in his eyes. "Boss, we tell you something 'bout dese island.

Him very queer island. Back in dem hills, across dem hills, dey——"

"Hush," cautioned the professor. "Not another word now, my man. Here comes the head of this rascally collection of law-breakers."

Monday subsided instantly. A vacant look crept into his eyes, which an instant before had been dancing excitedly. His companion also relapsed into apparent listlessness. In many ways these natives of the South Seas were fully the equal of any white man in their quick perception and keen insight. They were quite as much in possession of the facts concerning Lake and his crew as were the rest.

As the professor's sharp eye had noted, Lake had clambered down from the rigging a few minutes before. His face bore a satisfied look as he came toward the castaways.

"Waal, thar's your future home," he grinned, as he approached the little group.

"Perhaps you can tell us if I am correct in my assumption that the island is one of the Queen Charlotte group off the coast of Canada?" in-

quired the professor, adjusting his spectacles and turning to Lake.

"I ain't sayin'," was the sullen rejoinder. "It's enough fer yer ter know thet we're bound fer thet island, and ye're a mighty lucky lot not to be at the bottom of the sea at this minnit. I tell yer I hed a hard time persuading Zeb Hunt and ther crew not ter finish yer off."

Tom shuddered at the rascal's calm tone. He spoke without the slightest concern. As he gazed at the rapacious face of the leader of the Chinese runners, Tom did not doubt that the unfortunate Chinaman at that moment reposed where, according to Lake, Zeb Hunt and the crew would have liked to see them.

As the schooner drew closer to the island, Tom perceived what Lake had noticed through the glasses some time before. This was, that on the beach, flying from a tall, white flagstaff, was a square of red bunting. What this meant he was presently to find out in an odd manner.

Lake and Hunt went below as the schooner approached the island. Their heads were close

together in deep consultation as they entered the companionway. Tom wondered what they could be discussing—the fate of the castaways likely.

The island, seen at closer range as the schooner drew nearer, appeared even more uninviting than it had from the distance. Tall, bare hills, rock-ribbed and cloven with deep crevasses, ran back from its shores, piling up to a mass of rugged peaks and inaccessible-looking precipices. At the foot of these hills—or rather mountains in miniature—was a dense growth of dark, melancholy looking trees, of dark green and blackish foliage. These Tom learned later were mostly pine trees and other conifers.

It was the part of the island immediately about the flagstaff, though, that interested him the most. Here quite a clearing seemed to have been made in the dense forest, and a cluster of rough huts could be seen, with several figures moving about. Against the dark background the red flag floated out like a flame.

While the others stood in a group at the rail watching all this, Tom retired to a seat on the

edge of the cabin skylight. As it had grown warm with the dropping of the wind, one of the sections of the light was open, and through it the voices of Hunt and Lake drifted up from the cabin as they sat talking.

"We won't be able to lose much time, cap," Tom could hear Zeb say; "the red flag is up and that means that the steamer has called with another load of Chinks and gone away again. The sooner we run them through the better, more especially as Chillingworth is out of the way."

"Why, thar's no hurry, is thar?" inquired Lake. "I'd like a bit of a run ashore thar to git my head in shape again. Then, too, thar's thet gold back in ther hills. I mean ter sic' that professer onter thet, Zeb."

"You still think thet's gold-bearing rock, then?"

"I'm sure uv it. Ef only it is, we'll get rid of this crew uv ours, Zeb, and you and I 'ull chuck this Chink running business and settle down ter mining. It's not so dangerous, an' almost as profitable."

"Well," came Hunt's voice, "I've only one thing ter say, pervisions is short, an' ef ther steamer has landed another bunch of Chinks, the less time we keep 'em ashore the better. Then, too, this wife of Chillingworth's is bound ter kick up a turribul rumpus when she finds her husband is gone. All things considered, I say let's get the job over and done with, as quick as possible."

"I dunno but what ye're right," rejoined Lake, "and——"

But here the noise of the crew, as under the orders of Zeb's assistant, a little bow-legged fellow, with a fringe of beard under his chin, they began to work the schooner on another tack, drowned all other sound.

Tom arose from his seat, not wishing to court discovery by remaining there longer. He felt that he had overheard an important conversation, though. In the event of Lake's and Zeb's having to make a quick run back to the coast, perhaps it would be possible in some way to smuggle themselves on board, or at least work out some plan to get back to their own people.

Then, too, there had been some hope in what the Kanaka had said. Evidently he and his companion knew something about the island which was of high importance to persons in their position.

Altogether Tom felt quite heartened compared to his despondency of a short time before.

By dinner time the schooner had been worked quite close to the island, and when they came on deck after the meal they found that not more than a few hundred yards separated her from the shore. While they had been down in the cabin she had slipped in through a passage in a sort of reef that extended from the shore. She now lay in deep, calm water, scarcely moving. As Zeb shouted the command and the anchor rattled and roared to the bottom of the lagoon, several boats put off from the shore and came toward them.

Tom looked toward the rough, precipitous shores with a strange mingling of excitement and apprehension. What lay in front of them on that island? Was it to prove the scene of their

indefinite imprisonment in practical slavery to Lake and his crew?

The boy could not but think that the outlook appeared as sombre as the leaden skies, the drab, rocky hills, and the sullen, gray sea outside the reef. But he determined to put a brave face on it, and began to watch, with some interest, the boats pulling toward them.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ROCKING STONE.

It is not our intention to detail all that happened during the first week of the castaways' stay on the island. Soon after the schooner anchored they were landed in boats and found themselves in the midst of a strange community indeed. As had appeared from the sea, the collection of huts—roughly built of driftwood and roofed with anything that came handy—ran almost down to the margin of the sea. Behind them were great thickets of thorny, straggly brush, in places higher than a man's head. This, they learned afterward, was considered to be impenetrable. Rumor about the camp had it, though, that Simon Lake and his mate had managed to traverse it, and had formed paths among the dense growth which were only known to themselves. However that might be, nobody ever appeared to enter it for any purpose.

The camp, or collection of shanties, therefore, was to all intents and purposes, an island within an island. The great shed or barn-like structure which Tom had noted from the sea was, so it now transpired, a sort of detaining shed for the Chinamen until they could be shipped south to the States. It was fitted with numerous bunks and rough cooking places of brick, made from a kind of sun-dried clay. When the party from the schooner came ashore it was occupied by some hundred or more Chinese, who came curiously to the doors and gaped at the newcomers till some of Lake's men roughly drove them back.

As for Tom, he could not but admire the system which the rough New Englander seemed to have instilled into the working of the affairs of the island. There was, it appeared, a regular division of labor, the men taking it in turns to go south with the Chinese and to stay and guard the island and receive the steamer when it came from the north with a fresh installment of yellow men. In this way Lake had effectually suc-

ceeded in silencing all grumbling over unequal division of tasks.

Lake himself was in absolute command of everything and everybody. It could be seen that his rough crew feared as well as admired him. As everywhere where several men are gathered together, some of the islanders were of a better sort than others. With one of these fellows Tom soon struck up an acquaintanceship. He was a man who had been with Lake on sealing cruises and had in this way drifted into his present life. He confided to Tom that he would be glad to get out of it, but that Lake had made them all swear, under threat of terrible penalties, never to desert the band.

We have not referred to our party as prisoners, for in the literal sense of the word they were not. As will have been seen, there was no need to surround them with the constant guard and surveillance that Lake's gang would have been compelled to exercise elsewhere.

Indeed, every one of them realized bitterly that they were more effectually in captivity than if

they had been encompassed by stone walls and iron bars. From the bleak, barren islet there was literally no chance of escape, unless they had sought freedom by utilizing an airship. True, the schooner lay at anchor in the little bay, and they were a numerous enough party to have worked her, for both the Kanakas were expert seamen. But the beach was patroled day and night, and, although there was nobody on board the schooner to repel them, yet she was, to all intents and purposes, as inaccessible as if she had swarmed with men and guns.

True to his word, Lake had set them all to work. Hitherto he had kept a sort of rough set of accounts. It now became Mr. Chillingworth's duty to tabulate and assort these and enter the various transactions of Lake's unusual "business" in different books. Then, too, the provisions of so considerable a party called for a good deal of bookkeeping. The rancher welcomed the work, however, and plunged into it with avidity. It kept him from thinking, he explained.

As for Tom, employment of an unique sort

was found for him. It has been mentioned that Zeb Hunt had complained of a shortage of provisions. It was, in fact, the case that food on the island was scarce and daily diminishing. At the time the party landed the men were already beginning to grumble. Lake's presence at first had the effect of quieting them, but within a few days the discontented mutterings broke out afresh.

It was this condition of things that occasioned Tom's employment in a strange occupation for such a place. The Bungalow Boy was appointed by Simon Lake storekeeper and purveyor of provisions. He had a hut provided for him in which he kept his stock—all the provisions on the island. These he doled out three times a day, giving to each man his exact portion. It was no sinecure of a position, either. Tom, who, of course, was in no way responsible for the arrangement or for the shortage of food, had to meet many black looks and insolent threats as he gave each man his share, and no more, in the measures Lake had provided for the purpose.

For an assistant he had Professor Dingle's boy, and for the first time in his life that youth was kept so active that he had little time to ask foolish questions. At the time Tom assumed charge of the store the main provisions left in the colony consisted of flour, coffee, oatmeal, a little bacon, and some spices and sugar. For meat the men had to depend on the fish they caught—luckily, they were plentiful. Lake had, at one time, maintained a flock of sheep and goats, but these had long since been used up.

As for Professor Dingle and the two Kanakas, no occupation had, as yet, been found for them, but they helped at numerous small tasks about the colony. In return for their services the castaways had been given a hut in the rear of the storeroom. Here they ate and slept and indulged in long talks, none of them caring to mingle with the rough characters of the colony, with the exception of Tom's friend, whose name was Lucas Tryon. This man was always a welcome visitor, and he more than repaid what entertainment they were able to give him by the

things he told them about the island and the ways and customs of its dwellers.

One morning while they were still lingering over the remains of their scant breakfast, Lake himself slouched in. His wound had now quite healed. Only a white scar remained to show where he would always carry a mark.

"Waal, perfesser," he remarked, "ef you air ready, I reckin I've got a job fer you ter tackle ter-day. Come ter think uv it, ther rest uv you might come along. Zeb 'ull look arter ther store, an' he can take care of ther kid, too."

The professor at first demurred to this, but Lake's manner showed that he was not to be trifled with. Whatever he had in his mind to do he evidently meant to accomplish without delay. It is a curious light on the character of Zeb Hunt that, rough, brutal man that he was, he had become seemingly much attached to the professor's little lad and was never irritated at his endless questions. The professor, therefore, felt less reluctance to leave the lad behind them.

Soon after, with some of the rapidly lessening

stock of provisions with them, the party, at Simon Lake's heels, struck into the brush. Behind them in the little settlement were black looks which Tom could not help but notice. But he had grown so used to this in the store that he paid little attention to them. Once or twice the sullen demeanor of the men had seemed on the point of flaring out into actual mutiny, but, so far, Lake had been able to quell it. It did not occur to Tom that things were rapidly reaching a crisis.

From the camp the brush appeared to be impenetrable. But under Simon Lake's guidance they soon found themselves on a narrow trail which wound steeply off up the overgrown hillside.

Lake said nothing, but stolidly plodded on till he reached a spot where the trail opened out into a small clearing—a natural space in the midst of the dense, rank growth.

"Sit down," he said, motioning to some rocks which cropped out of the ground here and there. "Afore we go any farther I'm goin' ter tell yer

why I brought yer along on this cruise. Back in these mountains Zeb Hunt and I, on a hunting trip some time back, stumbled across what I believe are gold-bearing rocks. That's what I wanted ther perfesser along fer. He's a scientific gent, and kin tell in a minnit whether er not they be worth going arter."

"How far is this place from here?" inquired the professor.

"Not more than an hour's tramp by the trail I'm going' ter take yer," was the rejoinder. "I jes' thought, though, that I'd stop and make it all clear to yer whar we air bound fer."

"I fail to see what difference it makes since we are under compulsion to accompany you, anyhow," said Mr. Chillingworth, rather bitterly.

Lake looked at him sharply.

"Waal," he said slowly, "thar's five of you and only one uv me. But," and a slow smile crept over his face as he gazed at his belt in which hung two revolvers, "somehow I don't believe it 'ud be healthy fer you ter try conclusions with me."

As he spoke he shouldered his rifle and, changing his tone the next minute, said briskly:

"It's for'ard, then?"

"Forward by all means," rejoined the professor.

They all, except the silent Kanakas, echoed his words. At any rate, this adventure promised to be out of the ordinary run of things, and there was just a chance that it might prove the stepping-stone to the way of escape for which they were always on the lookout.

It must have been high noon when they emerged from the rough, rocky ground in which the brush found root and entered upon scenery of a totally different character to any they had yet encountered on the island. The denseness of the brush, which had prevented their looking about them, had concealed from them the fact that in the past hour of their march they had been rising very rapidly.

They now found themselves in a barren sort of tableland, which looked sun-baked and drear. Its surface was seamed and cracked as if by vol-

canic action in the past. Almost directly ahead of them, as it appeared, towered the ragged steeple-like peaks which were such conspicuous objects from the sea.

But a closer inspection proved that, as a matter of fact, the peaks were separated from them by a gulf or chasm, which, as a remarkable natural phenomenon, merits some brief description. A few steps across the arid tableland brought them to its edge. Tom could not repress a shudder as he gazed into the fathomless rift. Seared by volcanic fires till its sides were of a reddish, angry hue, the abyss itself seemed to have likewise been the result of some tremendous convulsion of nature.

It cleft the island into two parts like a crack in a plate, for it extended clear across it from one side to the other. While they were gazing down into the depths of this horrid profundity, Monday gave a sudden cry, and pointed to a large rock of conical form which upreared itself like a huge obelisk on the edge of the precipice not far from where they stood.

"Matura seral!" they heard him exclaim to Tuesday, who was gazing at the object with wrapped interest.

"You have seen that stone before, Monday?" asked the professor, reading aright the expression of the two South Sea natives.

"Yes, boss. Many time when here with whaler. They call him Matura Seral—in our language that mean Rocking Stone."

"A rocking stone, eh?" echoed the professor, beaming behind his spectacles. "One of those truly interesting glacial freaks."

He hastened forward, following Lake, who had already started for the stone, of the existence of which he seemed perfectly well aware. At any rate, it was not an unfamiliar object to him, for as he reached its side he laid one of his hands upon it, and, to the amazement of the rest, they saw the mighty mass of stone actually quiver and sway. Yet so perfectly poised was it on the edge of the chasm, where the same convulsion that had caused the rift had probably deposited it, that in the countless ages it had stood there it had not moved from its base.

"Waal, gents all," said Lake, as they came up, "here's whar we stop."

"So it seems," said Mr. Chillingworth; "but where is that gold mine you brought us here to examine?"

For reply Lake pointed across the gulf at their feet. Exactly opposite to where they stood they could now see on the wall of a precipice facing them a narrow ledge. At one end of this ledge was what appeared to be the mouth of a cave.

"Thar," said Lake, indicating the opening; "thar's the place."

"How on earth do you expect to cross this gulch?" gasped the professor, looking at Lake, as if he were in doubt as to whether the fellow was in his right wits.

Lake exerted a little more of his great strength and gave the rocking stone a great shove. It bent outward and dipped over the gorge.

"Hyar's haow we'll cross," he said. "It's a bridge put hyar by either God or the Devil, but it's come in handy fer Simon Lake."

CHAPTER XX.

BURIED ALIVE.

It was Monday who broke the silence that followed.

"Dat right, boss," he said. "In old time me come here wid whaler we go on stone lots of time."

"All same stone in our country," added Tuesday.

Lake stared at them with a dropped jaw. It was plain to see he was astonished.

"You've crossed by this stone?" he asked sharply.

But Monday shook his head.

"No," he said, "but some time we come here and rock on him."

For some reason or other Bully Banjo seemed mightily relieved at this.

"Waal," he said, "it's a simple thing, arter all. Jes' a matter of balance. But I tell yer it took

nerve ther first time me an' Zeb crossed over, although we knew the rock would work—at least, the sealer wot told us about ther mine told us that ther thing was safe. And now, perfesser, ef you've no objection, we'll jes' send one of yer blacks across since they're used ter it, an' when they land safe on the ledge it'll give ther rest of you courage."

"Monday, do you mind attempting this?" asked the professor. The kind-hearted scientist would rather have tried the experiment himself—risky as it seemed—than compel one of his servants to go unwillingly. But he was under no such compulsion. Monday gave a broad grin that showed his white teeth in an expression of almost childish pleasure.

"Me like go, boss," he said.

"All right, then. Up with yer," ordered Lake brusquely. "I don't want ter fool away too much time hyar, but I jes' had ter know about thet gold afore we sail."

"Then you mean to sail soon?" asked the pro-

fessor, as Monday clambered up the rough sides of the rock.

"Ter-morrer, I reckon," was the rejoinder. "Yer see thet them boys uv mine are getting pretty ugly. Thet's one reason why I don't want to spend too long a time hyarabouts."

"Good heaven!" exclaimed the professor at the thought of his boy left behind in the camp. "You surely don't fear an outbreak of trouble while you're gone."

"No," rejoined Lake. "Frankly I don't, but you kain't mos' genally allers tell. Howsomever, I kalkerlate thet Zeb Hunt kin tackle any trouble thet comes along."

"I sincerely hope so," said the professor, somewhat reassured. He then turned with the rest to watch with rapt attention what was transpiring on the rocking stone.

Monday had now almost reached the summit, and under his weight the big stone was tipping gradually outward till the part of it he had reached hung above the gulch. It descended as steadily as the arm of a semaphore, and, although

the experience appeared to be a terrifying one, the black was smiling as though he enjoyed it.

As the point of the stone—which, as has been said, was cone-shaped—touched the rock ledge, Monday nimbly leaped from it and stood on the narrow shelf of stone. The fellow, like most islanders, was as agile as a goat. He smiled broadly back at his companions who, however, were not looking at him, but at the stone, which, relieved of its weight, now tilted back into position again as if actuated by some hidden machinery.

"Wonder how that old sealer felt the first time he tried it?" mused the professor.

"Kind er skeery like, I reckon," said Simon Lake. "I guess he——"

But Tom interrupted him with a sharp question. It was odd, but the idea which had just struck the boy had not as yet occurred to the others.

"How do you get back again?"

Lake laughed.

"Waal, yer see thar's a trail up thet cliff that

leads to ther top. Frum thar thar's a path thet leads to a cove the 'tother side of the island. Thar's mighty shallow water close in shore thar, so we kain't bring ther schooner round, but Zeb Hunt an' me keep a boat thar so that when we get through in ther cave we'll cut across the other half of ther island and row home in ther boat."

That solved the mystery which for an instant had perplexed them all. Lake, who seemed to be in high spirits, confided to them that all these secrets had been contained in the map of the place the old sealer had given him. Not knowing Lake's character, our party wondered a good deal at his flow of spirits for—except when he had his banjo in hand—he was generally taciturn and sullen. They did not know that danger acted on him like wine on some men. Affairs at the camp were far more critical than he had let them know. That morning Lake had received a note threatening his life if he did not immediately set sail. It was characteristic of the man that this only made him delay the more.

"The varmints. I'll teach 'em," he had muttered, as he tore the missive into shreds.

But the realization that mutiny was imminent had been the real reason for his visit that morning to the gold-bearing rocks. He wished to make sure that they were as valuable as he believed, and if they proved to be so he was quite cold-blooded enough to sail off and abandon the mutineers to their fate. Returning to the island at some later date, he would ransack it of its precious metal at his leisure.

Tuesday followed his fellow-countryman over. He made the passage in perfect safety, fairly squealing with delight as the big rock tipped with him. Then came Tom's turn. He also made the crossing without accident, as did the professor and Mr. Chillingworth. Simon Lake came last, carrying his weapons and a sack of tools which he had brought—a drill and such implements—the better for boring and obtaining samples.

When they all stood on the ledge and watched the big stone rise majestically for the last time,

Tom was conscious of a sinking sensation. What if something had happened to the trail—if it were blocked or something. They would inevitably be prisoners till death came to their relief. However, there was no time to dwell on gloomy thoughts like these.

While they had been making the passage of the gulch a change had set in in the weather. It had been bright when they set out, but now dark clouds had rolled up, obscuring the sun and casting gloom into the depths of the crevasse upon whose edge they stood. There was an oppressive feeling, too, in the air.

"Thar's a storm of some kind comin' up," commented Lake, gazing overhead at the driving clouds.

"Thunder?" asked the professor sniffing the heavy, sultry air.

"Looks like it. Ef it is one, we'll be glad of shelter. We git some hummers daown in these parts, I kin tell yer. They don't come often, but when they do, by Chowder! they deliver 'em in large packages."

As he spoke a few heavy drops of rain fell.

"Come on. Better hurry for the cave," cried Lake, hastening forward with his sack of tools. They followed him, keeping as close to the cliff-face as they could. The ledge was narrow, and it was unpleasant to think of what a misstep would result in.

The cave proved to be a large one and reached back some distance into the rock. Its floor was littered with bowlders and earth, where Lake and Zeb Hunt had carried on their prospecting operations.

The professor picked up a bit of the stuff. In the dim light they could see the dull glint of metal in it. Lake watched the scientist curiously.

"Waal," he said, "haow is it?"

"I cannot tell positively," was the rejoinder, "but if it is all like this, it is worth considerable per ton."

"Will she run two thousand dollars to the ton?" asked Lake curiously.

The professor shook his head.

"Impossible to say without adequate assaying implements."

"Make me out a list of wot yer want and when I come back from ther next run I'll bring 'em with me," promised Lake.

To Tom this speech seemed particularly ominous. It meant that there was no intention on Lake's part of their escaping.

"Here's a good boring," said Lake presently. He drew a lantern from the tool bag and lit it, holding it up against a place at the back of the cave which had been pecked at with a pick. To do this he had to squat down almost doubled up in the cramped space. This brought the tip of one of his pistol holsters against an outcropping rock and the weapon fell to the ground unnoticed by Lake, but instantly seen by Tom, who stood close behind. Without any very definite idea of what he meant to do with it, the boy slipped it inside his shirt. Perhaps he would have some opportunity to find use for it, he thought vaguely.

Lake, earnestly examining bits of rock and

handing them up to the professor, did not notice the loss of his weapon.

Suddenly there came an ominous growling sound from outside. It was thunder. The storm was rapidly nearing them then.

"Gee whillakers!" exclaimed Lake, suddenly springing erect. "Ef I ain't forgotten ter go an' look fer thet signal."

"What do you mean?" asked the professor.

"Why, frum ther top uv this cliff yer kin see ther camp with field-glasses. I brought mine along fer thet purpose. Afore I left I agreed with Zeb thet in the event uv trubble he wuz ter hoist a red flag. Ef everything wuz all right, he was to run up the blue one. I'm goin' up thar now afore ther storm makes it too thick."

He hastened from the cave and, making his way along the ledge, began to mount the face of the cliff by a narrow stairway cut at a sharp incline in the face of the acclivity. Presently he vanished at the summit. It was then that Tom, with shining eyes, turned to the others.

"Our chance to escape has come!" he exclaimed.

"How do you make that out?" asked Mr. Chillingworth listlessly.

For reply Tom drew out his pistol.

"We can make Lake prisoner on his return," he said eagerly, "and then make our way across the island to the cove in which, as he told us, he had hidden the boat."

"Good gracious boy!" cried the professor excitedly. "That's a good idea. A splendid one, but—what about my boy?"

Tom, who in his excitement had quite forgotten that the son and heir of the Dingle fortunes was in the care of Zeb Hunt, looked thoughtful.

"Of course, we must get him," he said. "I'll tell you," he cried, his eyes flashing at the adventurous daring of the plan he was about to propose, "we'll make Lake prisoner and take him along with us. With him in our power, we will be in a position to make terms with the rascals. We can conceal him somewhere and refuse to give him up till we get our liberty and the boy."

Perhaps to any one less desperately situated the plan would have appealed only as the forlornest kind of a forlorn hope. But to our party it seemed feasible, and even excellently practicable.

But as they stood discussing it in the cave mouth, there came a sudden blinding flash of lightning. Involuntarily they all stepped back within the cavern. The clap of thunder that followed the electrical display shook the cliff till it vibrated again.

"Wow! this is a real storm, sure enough!" exclaimed Tom. "I never saw such lightning."

"And no rain," said the professor; "that makes it doubly bad. These dry electrical storms are always more severe than those accompanied by a heavy downpour."

As he spoke there came another blinding flash, accompanied by a terrific peal of thunder. But the figure of Lake could now be seen coming down the cliff-face on his way back to the cave. The time to put their plan into execution had arrived. Amid the turmoil of the elements, they discussed it. It was agreed that Tom, hiding

behind a big fragment of rock at the entrance of the cave mouth, was to level his pistol at the unsuspecting desperado as he appeared. He was then to be disarmed and tied, and the rest of their arrangements they left in an undecided condition till the first part of the daring program was carried out. The main thing to do, so all hands agreed, was to capture Lake.

Nearer and nearer came the unsuspecting leader of the Chinese runners. Tom crouched back into his place of concealment as the other came on. The rest stood close behind him. They hardly dared to breathe as the footsteps of the man they wished to capture drew closer.

As his form was framed in the cave mouth Tom sprang erect, holding the pistol level and pointed straight at Lake's head. He saw the rascal grow white under his tan and open his mouth as if about to speak. But at the same instant there came a crash that seemed as if heaven and earth were being devoured in one vast catastrophe. At the same time a sheet of dazzling, burning white flame enveloped them.

The figures in the cave mouth were illumined in its livid glare as if cut out of black paper. Crash followed crash. Another and another. A sensation like that of the pricking of myriad pin points ran through them. The blue lightning darted, hissing viciously about them, bathing them in living electricity.

Bewildered and stunned, Tom saw Lake's figure reel and fall backward, clutching at the rock as he fell. The boy sprang forward to catch him and save him from falling into the abyss below, when a crash that dwarfed the others fairly stopped him in his tracks.

There came a mighty splitting, rending sound and Tom, looking upward in the direction from whence it came, saw the form of the great rocking stone swaying drunkenly on the bed in which it had rested securely through the ages.

Suddenly the great rock mass toppled out, its black form impending between the lad and the sky. The noise of its falling reverberated above the shriek of the storm and the thunder's loudest roar.

Instinctively Tom tottered backward as it fell. Stunned, half deafened, and numb from the lightning, he reeled like a sick man. But even above it all, he could hear Lake's wild death-shriek ringing out as he plunged backward.

The next instant there was a shock that seemed to shake the cliff to its mighty foundations. The dim light of the storm-shrouded day was blocked out, and at the same moment Tom lost consciousness.

But to the others there came no such merciful blotting out of the strange horror of the situation. In the very act of overpowering their enemy, they had, in turn, been overwhelmed by a crushing disaster.

The rocking stone, driven and unseated by a terrific thunderbolt, had lost its delicate balance and toppled from its base into the abyss.

In its fall it had wedged across the narrow gorge, blocking completely with the weight of tons of stone the entrance to the cave.

The castaways of Bully Banjo's island were buried alive beyond hope of escape.

CHAPTER XXI.

MR. CHILLINGWORTH FIRES—AND MISSES.

As is often the case where a disaster so complete has overtaken men, their very powers of speech seem to be taken from them. We read of men entombed in mines sitting silently awaiting the end, and of the silence in which disabled submarines have sunk to the bed of the sea.

It was so in this case. After a brief examination had shown them, what in fact they already knew, that tons of stone blocked their escape from the cave, they had relapsed into apparent apathy.

No one even appeared to notice Tom, who presently came to himself and stood dizzily upright. The lamp still burned in the rear of the cavern, shedding a dim, yellow light. But outside its rays the place was pitchy black. The weight of the rock that had fallen blocking the cave mouth had also shut out all sound of the fury of

the storm—so that the place was as silent as a graveyard.

In answer to Tom's questions the professor told him in a dull, listless voice, what had occurred. Tom was a plucky lad and had faced a good many dangers without flinching, but as he realized their position his heart sank, and he felt a queer, sickish feeling, that, if it were not real panic, approximated it pretty closely.

"Then there is no hope?"

Tom heard the professor to the end and then spoke in the same dull, toneless voice.

The other shook his head.

"A convulsion of nature seated that stone there," he said; "another one displaced it. It is hoping too much that a third will occur and free us."

"Then we must sit here till we die?"

Mr. Chillingworth's voice struck in. It was as lifeless as the tones of the others.

As for Monday and Tuesday they took no part in the conversation, but sat moodily in the rear

of the cave accepting their fate in a stoical manner.

"I am afraid that the only thing for us to do is to die like men and Americans," said the professor bravely.

"Oh, no! no! I cannot die like this. I must get out! Oh, heaven, I won't die like this!"

As he shouted thus incoherently the rancher dashed himself against the rock that sealed the cave mouth. Tom started up to drag him from the entrance and prevent his uselessly bruising and cutting himself. But the professor laid a hand on the boy's arm.

"Leave him alone," he said; "poor fellow. Life was good to him. He will be quieter when that paroxysm is over."

And so it proved. The rancher's desperate fit left him weak and exhausted. He sank down on a bit of rock, his head buried in his hand. But his heaving shoulders told what he was enduring.

Tom felt that he, too, would have liked to leap to his feet and hurl his body at the imprisoning rock, but he restrained himself by an effort.

"If I am to die, I'll at least try to die as a man should," thought the boy to himself.

For some time more they sat in gloomy silence. The only sound that broke the hush was that of Chillingworth's sobs. Presently the professor arose, and not with any real sense of finding anything, commenced, with the aid of the lantern, a thorough examination of the cave. But if he had ever expected to find any outlet, he was disappointed. The place was without any other aperture than the one the fallen mass of stone had sealed.

"Do you think that any one will ever find our —our—bodies in this dreadful place?" said Tom, as the professor, abandoning his search with a sigh, rejoined the boy.

"I am afraid not," said the scientist gloomily. "Why, what did you have in mind, my boy?"

"Why, I have a bit of chalk here," said Tom. "I thought we might scrawl up our names and the date and what happened on the walls of the cave. It would be a record in case—in case—"

his voice shook, but he controlled it bravely—"they ever found us," he concluded.

"At any rate, it will be something to do," agreed the professor, falling in with the idea heartily. "But why not leave a more complete message—an account of our strange captivity, and so on? I have a pencil somewhere, and a tablet for making scientific notes."

"Good!" rejoined Tom. "You write the lengthy account while I chalk up a shorter record on the rocks."

He turned toward the wall, looking about for a smooth place to letter their last message upon, while the professor began fumbling in his pockets for his pencil. The implement did not seem to be handy. At any rate, the man of science explored all his outside pockets without result. Then he began on his inside ones.

Suddenly, while he was feeling about inside his coat, he gave a cry that echoed oddly through the silences of the sealed cave. So sharp and so peculiar was the tone that Chillingworth looked up from between his hands.

"Have you found the pencil?" asked Tom, in a steady voice, turning from his work with the chalk and coming toward the professor.

The next instant he felt a sharp chilling of his senses. The professor's mind had undoubtedly given way under the strain of the terrible situation.

He was creeping toward Tom, holding something with the utmost care between his long fingers. He was regarding this object, which, Tom thought from its shape, must be a pencil, with smiles of what seemed insane delight and foolish, meaningless gibberings.

"What's the matter, professor?" asked Tom, stepping briskly toward him and adopting a tone like one would use toward a child. "Come, brace up, sir. Don't give way!"

For the professor was now giggling hysterically. The Kanakas, sullenly crouched by the lamp in a far corner, regarded him curiously. Monday tapped his forehead significantly.

"Tom, my boy," breathed the professor, laying a bony hand on the boy's shoulder—"Tom, I'm

not crazy! Listen to me." Then evidently making a strong effort to control himself, he sank his voice into a hard, level tone: "We have a chance of escape!"

Tom gave an amazed gasp. Words—he had none to fit this staggering statement.

"Do you see this little tube?" the professor went on.

He held up the long, thin, cylindrical object which Tom had mistaken for a pencil. He now saw that it was a glass tube about ten inches long and filled with a yellow, pasty-looking substance.

"In that tube are four ounces of my explosive," whispered the professor, his eyes burning.

"The same stuff that blew Mrs. Bijur's roof up?" gasped Tom, but without a hint of laughter in his voice or on his face. He began to see what was in the wind now.

"Yes," was the rejoinder; "at least what exploded there was not more than a hundredth part of this tube, and it was not of anything like similar strength, being diluted. I had this explosive with me on the yawl, thinking that I might use it

in geological work—diluted, of course. When the collision came I recollect seizing up this tube of my invention and thrusting it into my coat. In this rush of recent events I had forgotten it till this moment, when, in my search for a pencil, I encountered it."

"What do you mean to do with it?" asked Tom, in the same breathless tones. Without knowing it, he was clutching the professor in the intensity of his excitement and eager hope.

"I mean to attempt to blow up the rock that blocks the entrance of this cave," was the calm reply. "We have tools—a drill, and we can use that long stick I cut as a walking staff, for a tampon to drive the charge home."

"But how are we to fire it?" asked Tom. "We have no fuse and no means of getting one."

"Confound it!" exclaimed the professor, his hopes dashed to the lowest ebb once more. "What a fellow I am to forget details. What are we to do? Here we have the means of escape within our grasp almost, only to see them snatched away by such an unlucky chance as this. In any event,

an ordinary fuse would do us no good. My explosive only ignites by detonation—in other words, by being dealt a hard blow. If only we had a fulminate of mercury cap——"

"Might as well wish that the stone hadn't fallen," said Tom briskly. "I tell you what, Professor, let us start those Kanakas drilling a hole in the rock where it seems thinnest. While they are doing it we, perhaps, can think of some plan to explode the charge."

It is a striking example of the effect of action on men that the Kanakas, once they were set to work, became far less gloomy. They tapped the rock eagerly to ascertain, while the professor listened to see, where it sounded the least solid. He finally selected a place and ordered the two South Sea natives to commence their bore there. They at once set to work at the task, while Mr. Chillingworth, who had been roused from his lethargy by even this remote chance of gaining freedom, talked over eagerly with the others the possibility of hitting upon a way to explode the charge and shatter the stone without using a detonator.

The rancher had had considerable experience with dynamite and giant powder on his ranch, where he had blown up scores of big tree roots, so that his contributions to the discussion were intelligent ones.

At last he sprang to his feet with a sharp cry: "I've got it. I know how we can explode that stuff."

The others looked eagerly.

"How?" asked the professor bluntly.

"By hitting it with a bullet."

"What?"

"I mean what I say. We have a pistol and two of us at least are good shots. We will place that explosive in the hole in the rock when it is drilled and then fire it by striking it with a bullet from the revolver Tom secured when Lake dropped it."

"That is a good idea," said the professor dryly, "but when the explosion comes what is to become of us?"

Chillingworth's enthusiasm vanished like the effervescence of a wet rocket.

"I didn't think of that," he said. "There is a chance that we might be blown to pieces by the same explosion that rends the rock."

"Perfectly correct," agreed the professor, with a curious ring in his voice, "but not necessary. The force of my explosive, when confined, is invariably downward and inward. That is to say, in this case if we bore a hole at a steep angle into the rock, we may be able to shatter part of it without hurting ourselves."

The Kanakas were at once set to work boring another hole slanting in the proposed direction. When this was accomplished, the professor gingerly placed the tube of high explosive within the aperture and announced that, so far as he was concerned, all was ready."

"Hold on a minute," exclaimed Tom, as a sudden idea struck him.

Drawing out his chalk, he marked a ring round the mouth of the bore.

"There," he exclaimed, "that makes a good target and the hole containing the explosive is the bull's-eye."

"Hitting which in this case may mean annihilation, swift and terrible," said the professor dryly.

"We must make up our minds to take that chance," said Mr. Chillingworth firmly, and Tom was rejoiced to see that the rancher's nerve had come back.

"Will you take the first shot?" he asked, handing the pistol to the rancher.

The Kanakas gazed on curiously. They had been told of the daring attempt that was to be made, and had no objection. A shrug of the shoulders was their way of saying:

"As well death one way as another."

Mr. Chillingworth accepted the pistol and weighed it curiously to ascertain its balance.

"A nice little weapon," he said, in a calm voice.

"I think we had all better shake hands," said the professor, "before we retire to the rear of the cave."

Seriously the trio imprisoned in the living tomb shook hands and then started back to the

extreme end of the cavern. Just before they did this, the lantern had been placed where its light would fall on the target. This left the rear part of the cave in blackness. Perhaps they each were glad of this. Tom knew he had no wish to look at the others' faces, although he hoped that no trace of fear showed on his own.

Packing themselves as compactly as possible against the rear wall of the place, they fell into silence as Chillingworth made ready to fire. Only by a constant wetting of his lips with the tip of his tongue did the rancher betray his excitement. Tom could feel his pulses pounding and his heart beating till it seemed it would burst his ribs. The sweat rolled off his face. He wondered how the professor felt. Would Chillingworth never stop his everlasting balancing of the pistol and aiming of it at the target? What would Jack——?

"Now!"

The rancher's exclamation was followed by a sharp report, all the more deafening for the tiny space in which they were confined. Tom threw

himself on his face, and so did the others, waiting a second and a more terrible shock.

But it didn't come. For once in his life Chillingworth, who was rated a first-class shot, had missed his target.

CHAPTER XXII.

MUTINY.

"Flunked!" choked out the rancher, with a bitter little laugh. He handed the pistol to Tom.

"Here, you try. I'm free to admit that I haven't the grit to go through with it again."

Tom took the pistol almost mechanically. His disappointment was as keen as that of the others. They had keyed themselves up to the last notch of courage and determination, it seemed, and now it was all to be done over again. No wonder that the Kanakas' reserve gave way under the strain, and that they sat chattering hysterically as Tom dully examined the chambers of the revolver.

Right then he made a discovery that startled him. Their next attempt would be their last in very fact. Evidently Lake had been firing off his pistol before they set out for the hills—target practice was a common diversion of his,—and only two shells had been left in the chamber when

The sharp crack of the pistol was followed by another roar, more awful and awe-inspiring.

Tom appropriated the weapon. Chillingworth had fired one, leaving a solitary cartridge undischarged.

Without another word—without even notifying them of his discovery,—Tom balanced the revolver for an instant in his hand, and then taking fair aim hesitated no longer, but pulled the trigger.

Hardly had his finger crooked before the sharp crack of the pistol was followed by another roar, infinitely more awful and awe-inspiring. A blast of hot gas swept back in their faces, and Tom felt himself being picked up bodily by some mysterious force and dashed against the rock. He realized no more. How much later he recovered his senses he did not know, but he opened his eyes to find daylight streaming into the cave.

Under the tremendously powerful forces of Professor Dingle's explosive the great rocking stone had been, not blown to bits, but literally melted away. But this they did not find out till later. Tom's first task was to arouse the others

who lay in a semi-stupor all about him. He got the water canteen which had been brought with them and dashed some of its contents in his companions' faces. Presently they began to stir. Except for a cut above the professor's eye, where a flying stone had struck him, they were uninjured.

But the gases of the explosive had given them all splitting headaches, and as soon as they had recovered enough to be able to stand upright they hastened toward the glorious daylight which came pouring in—the daylight they thought they had forever bidden farewell to.

The storm had passed away, only distant grumblings of thunder remaining to tell of it. The sky was blue and clear once more. The lowness of the sun showed that it must be late in the afternoon. They must, therefore, have lain unconscious for some time. The first thing to be done was, of course, to make all haste away from the spot. A glance about them showed that by good fortune the ledge of rock remained intact. But at its edge, and quite close to them,

lay a curious object which it was some time before they made out to be a rifle.

It must have been Simon Lake's, and the weapon had probably been torn from his pocket by some freak of the same shaft of lightning that sent him to his death in the depths below. The electric fluid had actually melted the steel and fused stock, lock and barrel into one mass of molten metal. Tom shuddered as he thought of the shock that must have passed through Lake when the bolt struck.

A feeling of gloom came over the party, for base as Lake had been in life the manner of his death was surely a terrible one. Perhaps it was a retribution for his wild, lawless life. Tom at least felt that perhaps this was so. One thing was certain, the depths of the narrow rift would prove his sepulchre, for to have recovered his body from those profundities would have been impossible.

"Boss, me think me know um way to de cove wot bad man tell about," said Monday suddenly, as they were discussing their next step.

"You do? Good boy!" cried Tom; "then lead ahead."

"Yes, go in front," said the professor, "but first tell us how you come to know anything about the path."

"Long time ago, boss, as I tell you, me here in whaler," said Monday; "captain he bad man. Beat me and Tuesday. Pretty soon we desert. We come hide up in here. Find plenty paths every place."

Before many minutes they had climbed the steep flight of natural steps leading to the cliff summit, and stood there with a glorious panorama at their feet. At least the beauty was there to be enjoyed had they had the inclination or the opportunity to gaze upon it.

To the south lay the settlement. Its huts looked like tiny toys from that height, and at that distance. Between them and the settlement the dark gorge stretched forbiddingly, and beyond the gorge the eye rested on the endless wastes of greenish-brown thicket. All about was stretched the sea, and perhaps they did scan this

rather more closely than they had the rest of the outlook. But if any of them had hoped to spy a vessel—as men will hope for vain things—they were disappointed. The vast stretches of ocean about them were as empty of life as a desert. Under the sun the waves glistened and danced as if in mockery of their helplessness.

"Well, what's the course now?" inquired Mr. Chillingworth presently, with an assumption of cheerfulness.

"We will head through the bush under Monday's guidance," said the professor, "and find the boat which Lake mentioned as being moored in the cove. When we have found it we will row as close to the settlement as we dare and try in some way to secure food. But, of course, you do not need to be told that my main object in going there is to recover my boy. It was a grievous oversight not to have brought him with us; but it cannot be helped now. I think it only fair to add that if any one is opposed to my program that I will strike off alone when we

reach the coast and the rest of you can take the boat."

"As if we would!" said Tom. "No, sir, we'll stand by you, and if we get recaptured trying to get your boy, why, we won't be any worse off than we were before."

"That's right," agreed Mr. Chillingworth, "we'll stay with you till the finish, professor."

As Monday and Tuesday had appeared to entertain no doubts as to their place being at the professor's side, no more words were exchanged. A start was at once made down the rough path Monday declared would lead them in due course to the cove where the boat, which Zeb Hunt and Lake had used on their visits to the cave, was moored. After some time spent in laboriously traversing slippery rocks and pushing through thorny scrub, they emerged at length on the shores of a small cove.

Tom gave a shout as he discerned under some overhanging bushes the outline of a small white boat secured to the same clump which partially concealed it from view.

"The boat!" he cried. "So Lake did tell us the truth, after all."

"Unfortunate fellow," said the professor; "I am glad that almost his last words to us were not fabrications."

The little craft was soon cast loose, and with the two pairs of oars found in her, the Kanakas made her fairly skim over the water. Although they were by no means out of their peril yet, and were tired, hungry and thirsty, the adventurers could not repress a low cheer as the boat forged forward. At least they had a good boat under them, and the ocean before them when once they had secured the professor's little boy and a store of provisions.

The sun's disc was almost dipping below the western rim of the sea as they emerged from the cove, and the Kanakas, keeping cautiously close to the shore, began to pull down the coast toward the settlement. By the time they were approaching a little wooded point jutting out from the main part of the island it was almost dark.

"Beyond that point lies the settlement, according to my calculations," said Mr. Chillingworth. "I think our best plan would be to run the boat ashore at this side of the point and then clamber over the little neck of land. In that way we can see what is going on and how the land lies without exposing our lives unnecessarily."

The others agreed with him that this would be the best course to pursue, so drawing the boat up on the beach, taking care that some trees sheltered it from view, they set out to cross the neck of land.

It was almost as rough traveling as on the trail, and in their exhausted condition it took them longer than it ordinarily would to attain the eminence. When they finally reached the summit, however, and were able to see the other side, they saw that Mr. Chillingworth's guess had been right. The settlement lay at their feet. In the dim dusk the outlines of the big barnlike place where the Chinese were housed, towered up starkly. Out in the lagoon they could see the dark out-

lines of the schooner as she swung at her anchorage.

But as they gazed there came a startling sound: the sharp report of a pistol, followed by a regular fusillade of shots.

The uproar seemed to come from the centre of the collection of huts and shanties, and down toward the beach. While they stood gazing, dumb with astonishment at this new surprise, a tongue of flame flickered upward from one of the structures, and rapidly grew larger. The conflagration momentarily roared higher, crimsoning the sky and sea with a lurid glow.

"It's the store!" cried Tom as he gazed at the raging fire, "something terrible has happened."

"Mutiny and riot!" struck in Mr. Chillingworth, as a wild noise of shouts and yells and confused shooting was borne to their ears.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HEMMED IN BY FLAMES.

"I guess that this is as far as it will be safe to come."

It was Mr. Chillingworth who spoke. The little party had, by painfully creeping forward down the side of the jutting headland, managed to reach a position in the rear of the big shed which housed the Chinese under ordinary conditions. It now appeared, though, that it was empty. Doubtless its occupants had either fled in terror or had joined in the mad rioting.

From their point of vantage they had a clear view of all that was happening within the settlement itself, lit up as the place was by the glare-light.

They could see men rushing about the streets, if such the thoroughfares between the shanties could be called. The red glow of the flames shone on their faces, swollen and heated by the

fire and excitement, and perhaps by liquor, too. For they could see where a group had gathered about a big cask and was broaching it freely.

"Good heavens," exclaimed the rancher, "if they have started drinking what will happen?"

The professor uttered a groan. Anxiety for his boy was preying cruelly on him. He had all he could do to keep himself from rushing out from their hiding place and boldly demanding the lad, be the consequences what they might.

Hitherto, however, the counsel of the others had prevented his taking such a mad step. In the present mood of the men there was no telling to what lengths their folly might lead them. All felt that it would be dangerous to cross any of them for the present at least.

Suddenly a louder shout than the frenzied whoops and yells with which the mutineers had been making the night hideous, rent the air. It came from the neighborhood of the flames which were now dying down. Evidently something was taking place out of the ordinary.

"They're coming this way!" shouted the pro-

fessor presently; "what can have happened now!"

Nearer and nearer grew the babel of shouts. All at once, from around the corner of one of the huts appeared the figure of a man. He was running. Even at the distance at which they stood they could catch his sharp, quick breaths. Whoever the runner was he was almost spent. He carried some object in his arms, too. It looked like a sack of some sort.

Hardly had the figure appeared before around the corner in close pursuit of the runner there flashed a dozen or more forms. They were shouting wildly, and as they caught sight of their quarry they set up a yell.

"After him, boys!" came a shout from one of them.

"Kill the dirty dog!" came another yell.

"Yes, he is the cause of all our troubles, the beast!" screamed another voice.

"Good heavens, it's Hunt!" cried Tom suddenly.

"And he has my boy in his arms!" shouted the

professor the next instant. Casting all prudence aside, he dashed out of his hiding place toward the almost spent runner. Hunt ran staggeringly, reeling from side to side. He seemed to be wounded.

"It's all up now," groaned Tom, as he saw the lanky form of the scientist spring out.

"Well, I don't know that I blame him," said Chillingworth, "it's his boy, you know."

Tom nodded soberly, but made no verbal reply. His wits were too hard at work trying to devise something to do to get the professor out of his predicament, for, as the scientist had rushed up to Hunt and seized his boy from the red-headed mate's arms, the frenzied mutineers had opened fire.

"Follow me! Quick!" shouted Tom, as he perceived the scientist's danger. With the others close at his heels he dashed out with a loud "Whoop!"

He calculated on the effect of his wild cry and sudden appearance to check the onrush of the mutineers. It worked as he had expected.

Stricken with astonishment they halted for an instant. But that instant was enough.

"Here—get in here quick!" shouted Tom as he grasped the professor and whirled him about. The next moment the scientist had been propelled by Tom's strong young arms into the dark interior of the deserted Chinese barracks. An instant later his son followed him, and then came Tom with the Kanakas and Mr. Chillingworth who helped him in dragging Hunt's limp form for the mate had collapsed as the professor seized the boy from his arms.

As they all got safely inside Tom slammed the big door to, securing it with a heavy bar which, to his great delight, he had found on the inside. This gave them breathing space and a chance to lay Hunt, who seemed to be badly wounded, on a pile of bedding in one corner of the place. The man lay there panting for a few minutes, and then opened his eyes.

"What has happened?" he demanded, and then he gasped out, "Oh, I know now. You caught

me and dragged me in here. It was pluckily done of you, lad. But we are in a bad fix."

"You think the mutineers will attack us, then?" asked Tom.

"Not a doubt of it. I don't know how you come to be here, and there ain't no time to ask questions, but I'll tell you what happened soon after you left with Lake. A bunch of them fellers came to ther store and said they had decided that the time had come to make a general distribution of all the grub and then set sail on the schooner.

"Of course, I told 'em to go about their business, but they said that they was a committee, and that if I didn't let 'em ransack the provision house there'd be trouble. It seems they thought that Lake was lying to them about there being little grub left, and that they had an idea there was plenty. Well, to make a long story short, when I refused to let 'em have the keys they went away grumbling. Nothing happened till sundown, when I shot down one chap I saw sneaking up to the back door of the place.

"That was the signal for the trouble that had been smoldering. They charged down on the place like a lot of angry wasps, and I grabbed up the kid and ran. I saw it was no use to make a fight. I hid in a disused hut till just now, when they routed me out. Through a crack I watched 'em loot the storehouse. All the time they was sayin' what they'd do to me when they catched me. Pretty soon they found kegs of rum in the cellar, and then I knew it was about all over but the shouting.

"One feller suggests that they set the storehouse on fire when they'd got everything out of it, and presently I seen them touch a match to a pile of tinder and start the blaze up.

"I watched for a while and then figgered that if ever there was a chance of my escaping with the kid it was right then. So I crept out of the hut where I'd lain hidden. But as ill-luck would have it, just at that instant a bunch of them ran upon me. I started off in this direction, expecting every minute to feel a bullet in my back. The rest you know."

All this time there had come no sign from the mutineers. Outside things had, in fact, grown quite quiet. Ominously so. It meant, according to Tom's way of thinking, that they were hatching up some plan of attack on the big shed, and—not one of its occupants had any more dangerous weapon than a pocket knife.

Suddenly a voice outside hailed them:

"Ahoy thar! in ther shed!"

"Well, what is it?" shouted back Tom.

"Will you give us up Zeb Hunt?"

"What do you want to do with him?" asked Tom, while Hunt watched him with an agonized look on his rough features.

"String him up!" came the savage rejoinder. "Send him out here and you shall all get off without any bother frum us. But ef yer keep him thar we'll make you sorry fer it."

"You hear what he says," said Tom, facing round on the others, "what shall we do?"

"We would be a fine lot of cowards to give this man up to them after he has saved my boy at the risk of his life," said the professor.

"That's what I say," chimed in Mr. Chillingworth.

"So do I," agreed Tom, while Hunt sank back with a breathed "God bless you!" It was the most fervent wish that had ever left those lips.

"Wall, what be you a-goin' ter do?" came the voice. "The boys is gittin' impatient."

"You can't have Hunt!" hailed back Tom in decisive tones.

"What!" roared the fellow outside, "think of what you're a-doin' of, youngster. It's his life or yours—now kin we hev him?"

"Not in the longest day you ever lived!" shouted Tom, "now be off and do your worst."

"No fear of that, younker," the voice assured him; "look out fer squalls!"

"If only we had some weapons," exclaimed Tom. He stepped over to Hunt, thinking that perhaps the man had a pistol on him. But Hunt, when addressed, did not answer, and Tom soon made out that he had swooned again. Striking a match Tom bent over him. The man's shirt

was blood-stained, and he had, apparently, been wounded in the shoulder.

"He's got grit, anyhow," thought Tom. "He never said a word about his wound."

Tom would have liked to doctor him there and then, but that was out of the question. Before the hastily struck match had died out there was a wild yell from outside as the mutineers rushed upon the place. But if they expected the stout doors to yield they were mistaken. The portals shook and swayed under the onslaught, but they held firm.

After battering furiously upon them with blood-curdling threats as to what would happen when they did get them open, the mutineers gave over their fruitless task. Apparently they retired to talk over some other plan of attack.

This looked ominous. Enraged as they were by their failure to carry the place at the first assault, it was not likely they would risk a second failure.

"I hope they don't think of making a battering

ram," thought Tom, "they'd have those doors down in a jiffy if they did."

For some minutes thereafter they sat in silence, listening intently for some sound which might inform them of what the mutineers intended to do next. In the meantime, the half-famished refugees munched on some rice and bread they had found spread out upon a rough table just as the Chinamen had left it, apparently.

All at once Tom heard a queer sound—a sort of scratching, scraping noise at one end of the barn. It sounded as if something were being piled against it.

What could the mutineers be doing? Tom racked his brain in vain for a solution of the queer sounds for some minutes. Then he hit upon an explanation. It was such a horrifying one that every drop of blood seemed to leave his heart at the bare idea.

It was brush that was being piled against the barn from the outside. Such a thing could have only one meaning. The mutineers meant to set the place on fire.

Rapidly he communicated his fears to the others. But before they had time to formulate any way of facing this new peril there was the quick, sharp scratch of a match outside.

At the same instant a red glow shone through the chinks of the boards. As the flames rose higher, licking the sides of the barn, the mutineers broke into brutal cries and taunts.

"You cowards!" shouted Tom desperately; "do you mean to burn us alive?"

"Yes; you can all shrivel up like a bunch of rats or else come out and be shot!"

This utterance from one of the wretches outside was greeted by a chorus of approving shouts and yells. Tom turned despairingly to the others. As he did so the barn began to fill with smoke and hot sparks showered them. It was evident that they must soon adopt one of the alternatives hurled at them by the brutal mutineers.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE ROUND-UP.—CONCLUSION.

As the hot breath of the flames grew more ardent, Hunt began to stir uneasily upon his couch. Suddenly the wounded man came out of his swoon with a shout. He sat upright, staring wildly about him, his blood-stained, wan face illumined by the flames. But after his first instant of confusion he perceived at once what had happened.

"The dogs!" he exclaimed, reeling to his feet, "they've set the shed on fire. But we'll outwit them yet."

Tom was at his side in an instant.

"You know a way by which we can get out of here?" he exclaimed.

Hunt nodded.

"It's a good thing I come to when I did," he said, "or we all might have roasted in here."

He shuffled rapidly to the other end of the

shed, and kneeling above a big, flat stone which apparently served as a hearthstone for an open grate, he pressed some sort of mechanism. Instantly, before their astonished eyes, the stone swung open, revealing a flight of steps.

"A secret passage!" cried Tom, while the others uttered exclamations of astonishment.

"That's right," said Zeb, with a grin, "and the best of it is that there are only two persons on this island that knows of its existence. One's me, and tother's Bully Banjo. We made it in case a revenue should drop in here some day. Then, d'ye see, all we would have had to do would have been to herd the Chinks through it and bring 'em out in the brush half a mile away. But we never thought that we'd have to use it to get away from our own men.

"By the way," he said, gazing about stupidly under the pain of his wound, "where is Sim Lake?"

"I'll tell you about that later," said Tom, "the thing to do now is to get away. You go first, you know the way."

Led by the wounded man they plunged into the dark abyss, the professor's boy whining a little at the idea of descending into the dark, damp place. Tom came last, and he closed down the big stone behind them.

The passage was fairly commodious, and walking single file and slightly stooped it was not long before they reached the end of it and emerged in a clearing in the brush.

Looking around they could see behind them the red glare of the fire and the figures of the mutineers about it.

"They little think what a march we've stolen on them," chuckled Tom as he gazed.

"I suppose the cold-blooded rascals are waiting for us to appear, or to see the shed cave in on us," added the professor.

"Well, they will be disappointed this trip," said Mr. Chillingworth, "but surely I am not mistaken. By some strange chance that passage has led us almost to the other side of the headland where we left the boat."

A few seconds of reconnoitering proved that

this was correct. They were, however, on the hillside above the headland, so that they could see down on the blazing building. It was not a great way to the water, and they soon emerged at the spot where they had left the boat. They found everything as it had been when they came away.

"Well," said Tom, "I guess we had better get on board."

"What is your plan?" asked the professor.

"Rather a desperate one," rejoined Tom; "but it is the only thing I can think of. We can't put to sea without provisions or water, that's certain. Now, on the schooner we can find both. She is unguarded, and the only risk we run is being seen from the shore."

"By Jove! that's a great idea," cried Mr. Chillingworth. "As for being seen from land, I don't think there is any serious danger of that. Those rascals are all too busy about their own devices."

"I agree with you," said the professor. "It might even be feasible to sail the schooner out."

Tom shook his head at this daring suggestion.

"We don't know the water hereabouts well enough," he said, "and might only pile her upon shore. No; my idea was to stock up the boat and then pull out to sea. We ought to be out of sight of the island by daylight. Surely we can either sight a steamer or the mainland by the time our provisions get low."

With the Kanakas at the oars, and the wounded man lying in the stern, the boat was cautiously pulled toward the schooner. Tom's plans went through without a hitch. The men filled six water kegs and selected all the biscuit and provisions they wished, Zeb Hunt helping them with suggestions as to the best stores to take. During this time Tom found a chance to tell him of the fate of Simon Lake. Hunt sank down on a coil of rope, his head in his hands, as he heard. He was genuinely affected, for he had been fond of his leader in his rough way.

"Poor Bully Banjo," he said at length, rising to his feet. "It's the way he'd have wished to die. But it's sickened me of this business. If

ever I get clear of here I'm goin' ter live honest and clean. I've tried the other way, and it don't pay. For every bad deed a man does he has to pay in just so many days of unhappiness—that's been my experience."

"I believe you are right," said Tom, "badness never pays. It's only men and boys who live right who are happy."

Presently a soft hail from the professor apprised them that the boat was ready.

One by one they slipped down the Jacob's ladder, which was always hanging from the schooner's side when she was at anchor. Before many minutes had passed the boat, with her anxious passengers, had cleared the point and was being headed around the further point of the island toward the east. They knew that by keeping on in that direction long enough they would strike land. As they had provisions and water enough for several days on board they felt no anxiety on that score, and their hearts were light as they rowed through the darkness.

Before long the professor and Mr. Chilling-

worth dropped off to sleep. Tom and Zeb Hunt sat alone in the stern talking in low voices, while the two Kanakas rowed steadily as automatons.

All at once Tom gave a shout.

"Look! Look! A steamer's lights!"

"Whereaway, boy?" came Zeb Hunt's foghorn voice.

"Off to the south—look, she's coming toward us!"

"You're right, boy," growled Hunt. If it had been light Tom would have seen that a curiously anxious look crept over his companion's face. The coming of a steamer meant to Zeb Hunt that he would be placed in irons and taken back to the United States to work out the penalty for his crimes. But he said nothing, and presently the entire boatload was watching the oncoming steamer.

As she drew closer Tom made out that she was a small white vessel like a yacht. Her lights glowed brightly, both from her portholes and on deck. Evidently her company was up and about. Perhaps they had sighted the fire on the island,

which was casting a blood-red glare on sea and sky.

"Ship ahoy!" hailed Tom suddenly as the vessel drew closer.

"Ahoy yourself!" came an amazed voice from the foredeck of the vessel, "who the dickens are you?"

"A crew of castaways!" rejoined Tom. "Throw us a line, will you?"

But now another voice struck in from the strange vessel's deck:

"Tom! Oh, Tom!"

"Jack!" cried the amazed lad, recognizing his brother's voice.

"Hooray, we've found them!" came another voice, that of Sam Hartley. "Hooray, my lads! Three cheers!"

They were given with a will while the small boat was rowed alongside the larger vessel. A gangway was lowered and a perfect bombardment of questions began to rain down. It was impossible to answer them all, but in the babel the rancher recognized the voice of his wife.

Well, there is no use trying to give the details of the scene that ensued when the castaways were all safely on the deck of the big steam yacht—for such she was—and the small boat was towing astern.

In the first place everybody talked at once, and Mrs. Chillingworth laughed and then cried, and then cried and laughed again. It was the most joyous reunion the high seas had ever witnessed. And through it all only one figure stood apart—that of Zeb Hunt. Presently he slipped away and made his way to the stern, where the boat with her provisions and water on board was towing along.

Taking a swift glance around Zeb, despite his wound, hoisted himself over the stern rail, and with the agility of a sailor, dropped into the small craft. Then he drew his knife and slashed the rope. Free of the yacht the boat dropped rapidly astern in the darkness. As the large vessel's lights grew dimmer and died out, Hunt took up the oars.

"It ain't so very far frum here to the Canady

shore," he muttered; "and once there I'll be safe frum the law."

He gave a shudder.

"I guess what that kid said was right," he muttered, "it don't pay ter be bad, an' frum now on Zeb Hunt's goin' ter turn over a new leaf."

* * * * * * *

In the meantime, in the lighted saloon of the yacht, the castaways had told their story, and then Mr. Dacre and Sam Hartley started in on theirs, part of which we know. On a lounge sat Jack and Tom, their arms entwined round each other's necks, while Mr. Chillingworth and his wife sat happily side by side listening to the excited hum of talk. At some distance from the rest sat the bottle-nosed man; still he was a sharer in the general jubilation, too, for it was he who had piloted the yacht to the island.

But we are running ahead of Sam Hartley's narrative a little. Our readers will recall what Mr. Chillingworth and Tom did not, of course, know, namely, the Secret Service man's visit to the captain of the "Islander." From the descrip-

tion of the schooner the bottle-nosed man recognized Bully Banjo's craft, while Sam Hartley easily identified Tom from the description the captain was able to give of the boy who had sprung into the shrouds and hailed them.

This done, the next thing to do was to get hold of Mr. Dacre and telegraph to Washington about the results that had been attained. A dozen assistants had been rushed to Sam at once, and a week later the trim yacht "Idle Hour," under the flag of the U. S. Treasury Department, had set sail from Puget Sound for a mysterious destination.

They had sighted the fire a few hours before they picked up the boat and it had caused them a lot of apprehension. It looked as if things had come to a crisis too soon. But as it happened, things could not have fallen out better for Sam Hartley's purposes.

They anchored that night off the island, while all hands took a much-needed rest, and in the morning they landed. The followers of Bully Banjo, stupefied by drink and reckless rioting,

were an easy prey for the Secret Service men, who soon had them transferred to the schooner. It had been decided to tow the vessel into the nearest port, using her as a prison ship in the meantime.

The Chinamen who had fled in terror to the brush when the rioting broke out, drifted back one by one. They were rounded up and the situation explained to them. As it was impossible to take them on the schooner they were left on the island with plenty of provisions from the yacht till a Canadian government schooner could call for them and deport them to China.

A few days after these arrangements had been completed, the "Idle Hour" sailed for Seattle with the schooner in tow. In the meantime, the mine had been visited once more—by way of the cove—and several samples of ore taken from it, which the professor decided to assay when they reached port. He thinks, however, that they will prove to be very rich, and already negotiations are under way to acquire the mine. When the Bungalow Boys and Professor Dingle

do secure a right to work it the Kanakas will have a goodly share of the proceeds, and Mr. Chillingworth will not be forgotten.

Once more in Seattle Mr. Chillingworth was anxious for the party to return to his ranch, but the boys and Mr. Dacre both felt that they had seen about all they wanted of that part of the country. They therefore accepted the professor's invitation to visit him later at his home on the Great Lakes. First, however, they gave their evidence against the captured mutineers, all of whom were given sentences of more or less severity, including the treacherous Fu.

We could tell many things about the pleasant times the boys spent in the great metropolis of the northwest, and of some of the wonders they saw in that part of the wonderful Pacific Slope. But it is now time to leave them for a brief space.

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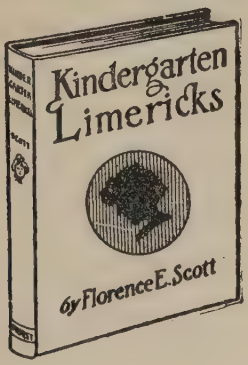

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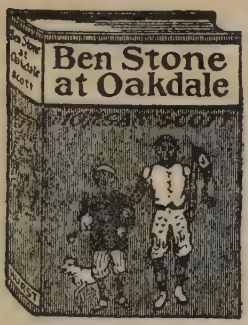

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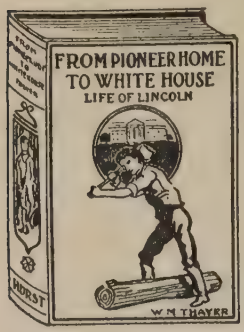

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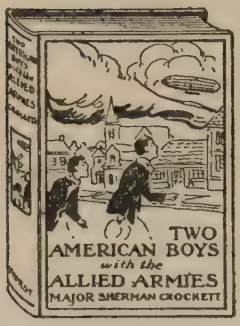

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